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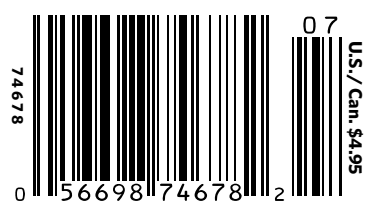
Parenting for justice in a troubled world.

by Brian D. McLaren, David M. Csinos, Catherine Maresca,
and Anne Marie Roderick



PLUS:

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'We exist!' Evangelical gay students join the conversation
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Retired Aerospace Engineer joins the “Nature of God” debate.

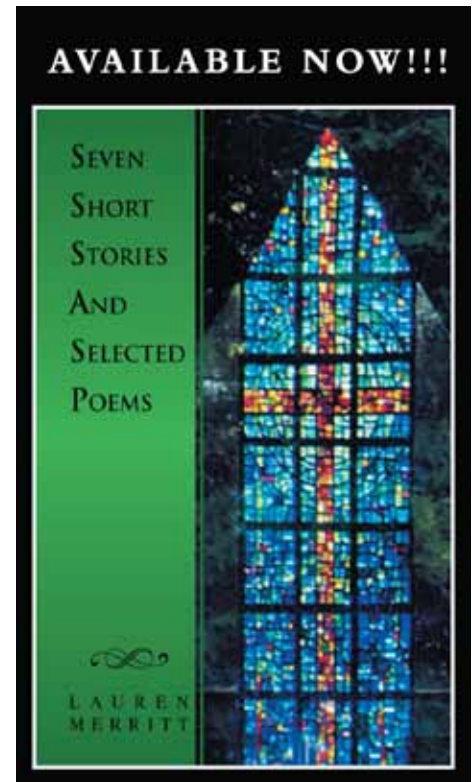
In author Lauren Merritt’s new and opulent offering, *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems*, he leaves behind the world of aerospace engineering and veers into the ancient debate of the nature of God. This collection of short stories and related poetry comes out in favor of “I am is God” which appeals to people who have had enough of the trappings of our present day religious organizations. He does this through relentless examination of his own spiritual journey towards self-awareness unleashing merciless insight, fiery wit, and fierce compassion through illuminating narratives and verses.

Born out of the author’s creative mind, *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems* features stories of heroes and heroines, love, lust and loss, reason and insanity, innocence and impurity. No matter the situation in which his protagonists find themselves – Adam’s endless search for Eve, one listless child’s longing for a complete family, a PTSD patient’s effort to overcome his trauma, one man’s participation in a ceremonial dance, a father’s lifetime of memories unearthed, a couple’s unfinished love affair – Merritt conveys their experience with endless wit and flowing prose that reminds readers, page by page, of the beauty of the written word.

These *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems* can be read as a literary journal of a great writer’s career, beginning with a stance that is cold, bitter and intellectual to one that is warm, inviting, and comforting. From the spiritual journey perspective, Merritt’s engineering knowledge of intellectual constructs allows him to steer away from rocky shores and sandy shoals to provide a clean, fresh, perspective to a rather ancient concept of God.

Lauren Merritt started his career earning a BSEE and MSE from the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Calif. His designs are now circling the earth, rusting away on the moon, and drifting away far beyond the orbit of Pluto. His career was cut short, having accumulated 12 patents and written 13 trade journal articles, in 2004 due to the onset of Parkinson’s disease. He has published a book of his poetry and continues to write poems and a weekly newsletter for Valley Presbyterian Church of Portola Valley, Calif. where he serves as Poet Laureate.

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OUR ABILITY, WITH God's grace, to help each other overcome fear—and all its subtle temptations to put up walls—is front and center in this month's issue. In "Breaking the Bubble Wrap," Brian D. McLaren and David M. Csinos explain how parents' desire to protect their children from the world's dangers can simply pass fear on to the next generation. Instead of raising too-sheltered children who may grow up with an ethic of fear and scarcity, moms, dads, and other caregivers who take the risk of truly engaging the world along with their children can see them blossom into thoughtful young people unafraid to follow God's call, including the call to social justice—people such as *Sojourners* editorial assistant Anne Marie Roderick, who shares about her upbringing in "Croon Her to Sleep with Freedom Songs."

Fear, whether of the unknown or of losing what one has, is also a part of the territory



that Isaac S. Villegas and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove unpack in "Stability vs. Mobility," and which Eboo Patel traces as he argues that "sacred ground" should be defined by who we let in, not who we keep out. Fear and blame, as Jim Wallis describes in "The Idolatry of Politics," are the key tools of those striving to foster a political idolatry that

crowds out a faithful concern for the least among us. And, as Jeannie Choi reports in "Changes in Attitude," fear of open discussion about homosexuality is something that evangelical colleges are overcoming as gay and lesbian students and alumni, and their straight peers, engage in frank and honest conversation.

It is not just analysis and discussion but also, as Lynne Hybels describes, shared pain that breaks down walls: West Bank resident

Siham Abu Awwad, grieving the loss of her brother and her nonviolent activist mother, finds unexpected healing in the warmth of an also-grieving Israeli woman. The journey away from fear and toward reconciliation is never easy, but with God, and the love manifested through our fellow creatures, all things are possible. ■

Letters

VACCINATION ABSTINENCE

As an enthusiastic new subscriber, I was stung by the article "Death by Individualism," by Danny Duncan Collum (May 2012). My family abstains from vaccinations, but "selfishness" is certainly not our motivation. After two of our children were diagnosed with autism, we have made many choices that set us on a path apart from the crowd, and we have made these choices out of love for our children. Please be careful when generalizing. The choice to refuse vaccines is a very difficult and very personal struggle that cannot be fully addressed in a few short columns of print.

Kathleen Murphy
Souderton, Pennsylvania

UNLISTED INNOCENTS

I wonder how many more people would be on the Innocence List of inmates wrongfully sentenced to the death ("The Innocence List," by Kimberly Burge, April 2012) if Sonia "Sunny" Jacobs and people like her were included. (Her story, along with six others, was famously told in the award-winning play "The Exonerated" and in the movie based on it, where she was beautifully played by Susan Sarandon.) Apparently she does not qualify because, after the true murderer admitted his guilt, she accepted an offer by the district

"As our civil liberties are dismantled, we must look to our spiritual core to find courage and guidance."

attorney to enter a plea (in which Jacobs did not have to admit guilt) to second-degree murder. Shouldn't the requirements to qualify for this list, which is doing so much to help change public opinion, be expanded to include the Sunny Jacobs of this world?

Jim Shanahan
Landenberg, Pennsylvania

CHURCHES AGAINST TORTURE?

Thank you for your article "Destroying Our Rights to Save Them" (by Dianna Ortiz, April 2012) about indefinite incarceration. Struggling with all these disturbing developments in the political arena, as our civil liberties are systematically dismantled and the Constitution thrown in the trash, we of faith must look to our spiritual core to find courage and guidance.

Christ didn't fight the Roman Empire; he usurped it by ignoring it and transcending it. But he did give the religious leaders of the time a hard word—"Woe to the Pharisees!" Maybe the Christian leaders of our time—those from the right and the left—could get

together and have a culturally relevant discussion about politically topical matters. What is the church's view on torture, indefinite incarceration of American citizens, and the general destruction of the Constitution? Men and women on both sides are outraged at this domestic threat. Let us not stay silent, like Thomas Mann in Nazi Germany, or wait too late, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dimitri Kadiev
Albuquerque, New Mexico

CORRECTION

Our June 2012 issue described Rebecca Barrett-Fox, interviewed in "The Face of Hate," as a former editor of *The Journal of Hate Studies*; in fact, she is its book review editor, while interviewer Joanie Eppinga is its former editor and current assistant editor. We regret the error.

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**SAN FRANCISCO
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BY JIM WALLIS

The Politics of Aslan



POLITICS IS A true American idol, and the 2012 election will dramatically demonstrate that reality.

People of faith should never worship at the altar of politics, because we worship God; the kingdom of God is never the same as the kingdoms of politics. Our worship of God should shape our engagement with politics. When politics shapes our religion, it distorts our true worship.

Rather than becoming the chaplains or enablers of political idolatry, the faith community should confront it. The idols of politics are many: the idol of money over democracy, the idol of celebrity over leadership, the idol of individualism over community, the idol of ideology over civility, and

the common good, with Jesus as the inspiration for it, I was again drawn to Aslan.

Aslan overcomes evil with good, shows the power of unconditional love, and is the cause of transformation. The lion confronts the bad but invites everyone into the good—friends and enemies alike. Aslan exemplifies the *common good*—making every decision and action in the best interest of the people and the land, but always paying special attention to the weakest and most vulnerable creatures. Sometimes it felt as if Aslan were walking beside me, up and down the coastal hills to the sea, teaching me again what it means to be a Narnian.

The lion helped inspire my hope to write a biblical and theological defense of the common good, something that has been almost lost in our age of selfishness. Yes, we need better public policies, but our deepest need is more spiritual than political. It's time to move beyond our superficial and even hateful politics and media—to dig down to the places that renew our faith, clarify our priorities, and set a moral compass for our economy and politics.

The 2012 election will likely be the ugliest in many years. The amount of money that will be spent, with little transparency, will fuel the politics of attack and should teach us that we will never be able to put values back into politics until we take the money out of it. The check writers now control the law writers in Washington, D.C., and the super-PACs that dominate politics are enemies of democracy.

People of faith, whether Republican or Democrat, should not be rallying around the “king” of their party with the uncritical support that the political elites urge. We should instead be raising our voices to defend and advocate for the people and principles that are essential

to our faith and our true worship of another king.

That means we must care most about what happens to the poor and vulnerable, while both parties make their appeals to the middle-class voters and wealthy donors they desperately need. It means actually protecting human life and dignity and promoting the real health and well-being of families instead of just substituting rhetorical devices around hot-button social issues to get votes.

It means lifting up the people who suffer because they have no political influence: Undocumented immigrants living in the shadows. Low-income families and children losing their nutritional and health-care support. The poorest of the poor who will die of hunger and preventable diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, or tuberculosis.

It means defending the policies that make for peace and practical solutions to the international conflicts that continue to divide and kill so many people, rather than bellying how righteous and strong America is and should always be.

Elections make a difference. Yet, ultimately, how we live and what we do for the common good are more important than how we vote. Political affiliation with candidates, parties, and structures is waning—especially among young people—and that's good news. The big question is, what will replace the traditional structures? Will it be the overwhelming power of money? Or might these changes lead to a new dawn of social movements and social media for the common good—focusing on people, principles, and values in a post-candidate politics? That's what Sojourners will work for. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners.

The lion helped inspire my hope for the common good.

the idol of winning over governing. Both sides take a problem and do two things: make us afraid of it, and then blame it on the other side. What they don't do is work together to solve our problems, finding solutions for the common good.

What caused me to rethink these questions of faith and politics was my encounter earlier this year with a lion in a monastic community overlooking the Pacific Ocean at the beginning of my sabbatical. Entering into solitude and silence with monks, punctuated only by Vigils, Lauds, Eucharist, and Vespers, can alter a person's perspective. In the monastery's guest kitchen library, I spotted the *Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis, and decided to reread them. Aslan the lion is the creator and leader of Narnia, the true and good king, and the stories' Christ figure. Because I was beginning to write a book about

Erik McGregor



Valley of Debt

At more than \$1 trillion, student loan debt is the new bubble in the U.S. economy. On July 1, interest rates on federally subsidized Stafford loans will jump from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent unless Congress steps in. In April, demonstrators (including performer Rev. Billy, at right) in New York City burned their student loan papers in a symbolic action of “debt jubilee.”

By Joan Chittister, OSB

A ‘Hostile Takeover’ of Women Religious

The Vatican attacks on Catholic sisters will sap the church’s impact in the world.

AFTER THE VATICAN’S “hostile takeover” of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in April, I was particularly struck by one joke I encountered: “Go Catholic ... and leave the thinking to us.”

I laughed—but not much. That one, it seems, is too close to the truth these days.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), a major educational center for superiors of Catholic women’s religious orders in the U.S., was launched in 1956 at the urging of the Vatican. For years, it has been a venue where officers of every congregation of women religious are invited to meet, study, and consider together the role and place of women religious in the resolution of the issues of the time. Now the LCWR has been put under the control of three bishops: Peter Sartain of Seattle; Leonard Blair of Toledo, Ohio; and Thomas John Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois.

The officers and body of the LCWR—all superiors, prioresses, or other officials of major, longstanding institutions—are

no longer authorized to plan its programs, engage its speakers, or create and implement its structures. Instead, Sartain, Blair, and Paprocki have been appointed to oversee the group: to approve its programs, create its constitutions, determine its operational

and impact. And it will do so in a period when we have never more needed compassion, care, presence, risk, and understanding.

The fact that there is a “magisterium,” a body of the church composed of the bishops and under the authority of the pope, is

Many pedophile priests were protected, but not one bishop has been put into receivership.

procedures, and define the content of its conferences. As in, “Leave the thinking to us.”

As in, women can’t do it themselves. Or, women aren’t moral agents. Or, women don’t know what they’re doing. Or, the girls need to be controlled. Or, father knows best.

To sap the LCWR’s vision and spirit, risk-taking and courage—the same qualities that over the years have opened convents in the wastelands, the badlands, and the marginalized ethnic communities of the United States—will drain the church of both presence

and impact. The fact that the role of the magisterium is to teach and interpret the rules of the faith is not the problem either.

The problem is that the teaching and interpretation of the faith must not be static but must develop in the light of the world in which we live. But in order to grow with the times, it is necessary to be close to those times. And that is where the sisters become the strength of the church.

Instructed by Vatican II to adapt their lives to “the signs of the times,” they did it.

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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They saw the new pain around them and headed straight into it: into peace centers, into women's issues, into the new poverities, into interfaith work, into social justice centers, as well as more deeply into adult education and health care and residential institutions. It took them into advocacy for minorities as well as into charity for the needy.

The "signs of the times" raised many questions, demanded much study, and took them into many public discussions. It also taught them that to admit that there are unanswered questions is not infidelity; it is the foundation of discernment. It is the beginning of growth. It is often the beginning of doing things differently in order to achieve what we have always valued.

The sisters have listened to every side of every question in an attempt to discern their best role in the church, their best gift to these

people at this time. This has apparently made them, in the minds of some, a danger to the faith. How sad.

Even more disturbing is the fact that not one bishop, let alone the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been put into receivership by the Vatican, however many pedophile priests were protected. No official document says that the bishops need guidance in their decision-making, however bad their decisions have been.

Only women are faced with that—the very women whose work with the poor might well be able to give the church its best information about where the church ought to be and what it ought to be doing there. ■

Joan Chittister, OSB, a Sojourners contributing editor, is executive director of Benetvision and a former president of LCWR.

By Marie Dennis

As the World Bank Turns

The Bank's new head has community-level anti-poverty expertise—and many challenges to face.

IN APRIL, THE World Bank's executive directors selected Dr. Jim Yong Kim to serve as its president. Kim, whose five-year term begins in July, will be the first World Bank president whose primary experience is in community-level development. Most of his predecessors were bankers or politicians.

As a co-founder of Partners in Health, an international nonprofit dedicated to "a preferential option for the poor in health care," and as a former director of the HIV/AIDS department of the World Health Organization, Kim has done groundbreaking work in delivering essential medicines for the treatment of AIDS to impoverished countries. He has a proven capacity for designing effective solutions to real problems. His election may well usher in a new culture at the World Bank—a culture that focuses not on economic growth that doesn't trickle down, but on poverty reduction that is real.

For almost 70 years, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been major players in the global economy; the World Bank has 188 member countries, all of which must first be admitted to the

IMF. In their many years of doing business, these institutions have reinvented themselves more than once. The World Bank's focus has evolved from rebuilding Europe and Japan following World War II to supporting large-scale engineering projects in so-called "developing" countries; from emphasizing nutrition, population, and poverty in the 1970s to "adjusting" the economic policies of countries in the global South, beginning in the early 1980s.

As the negative impact of IMF policies and World Bank projects on impoverished people and their communities became increasingly evident, people of faith and grassroots groups around the world, particularly in the global South, began demanding change. They organized and advocated for greater transparency, accountability, and participation, insisting that failed strategies promoted and financed by the IMF and World Bank were related to hunger and other poverty-related problems, a growing rich-poor gap in almost every country, and environmental destruction.

One advocacy focus has been *how* the

From the Archives

July-August 1996

A Latino Pilgrimage

"THIS YEAR

we're going to march together into the Promised Land," Dallas anti-violence activist Blanca Martinez told a group of young, mostly Latino pilgrims recently at a peace summit in Washington, D.C. Her statement may be prophetic indeed, for after years of wandering in the American political wilderness, Latinos are poised to ford the mainstream and make a stronger political impact than ever before.

For some time now the political juice of the Latino community has been boiling around issues such as April's videotaped beating of undocumented immigrants by Riverside County police, California's Prop 187, affirmative action rollbacks, and sharp new punitive measures that are applied disproportionately to people of color. Left with few alternatives, the diverse—and, at times, antagonistic—political, racial, and cultural factions of the U.S. Latino community are taking advantage of this election year to defend their rights—and perhaps some of America's most precious held values as well ...

It's not often that you hear teenagers—most of whom are too young to vote—talking about building multiracial coalitions of people to create change through the ballot box. But the time has come for these young people, who have already seen too many friends and relatives die violently on the streets of their communities. They understand the urgency that is needed for the healing of their communities. ■

Aaron McCarroll Gallegos was a member of Sojourners editorial staff when this article appeared.



World Bank selects its president. In response, a new process was approved in 2011. For the first time, it included an open nomination: Any citizen of a World Bank member country could be proposed by any member nation or executive director. Besides Kim, two other

An open nomination process and the election of a president with real-life, grass-roots experience solving some of poverty's most intractable problems are significant achievements. Yet, in an open letter of welcome to Dr. Kim, civil society advocates

World Bank decision-making power has been heavily weighted in favor of wealthy countries.

candidates were nominated, both from the global South—José Antonio Ocampo, the former finance minister of Colombia, and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria's finance minister.

However, demands for deeper governance reforms at the Bank, including just voting procedures and more equitable representation on the executive board, have not been met. Since the beginning, decision-making power in the World Bank and IMF has been heavily weighted in favor of wealthy countries: A country's voting power has been proportional to its financial contribution, and, traditionally, the World Bank president has been from the United States and the IMF managing director from Europe. (Kim, born in South Korea, has lived in the U.S. since he was 5.)

underscore the ongoing need for "transformative leadership" toward "serious and genuine" World Bank reform. Criticizing the Bank's current "massive support for large-scale, dirty fossil fuel projects" and "big, regional [infrastructure] projects with private participation," the letter urges the Bank to help "abolish health user fees and expand access to good quality education" and to support policies that "serve communities and smallholder farmers directly rather than corporate and government elites."

Is Kim's selection a sign of real change at the Bank? That remains to be seen. ■

Marie Dennis is co-president of Pax Christi International and a Sojourners contributing editor.

By Bob Hulteen and Tom Witt

Why Gas Is Too Cheap

What happens when a church tries to recognize the real cost of fossil fuels?

CHOOSING TO PAY more for a gallon of gas than the price at the pump sounds a bit crazy—but that is exactly what a couple of dozen members of the Community of St. Martin, a worshipping group of Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites, and others in Minneapolis, Minnesota, have covenanted for more than a year. It's one way they're seeking to show commitment to environmental stewardship.

After committing to a voluntary "tax" rate (from \$1 to \$3 per gallon, depending on income), each community member keeps track of gas receipts. The Community of St. Martin (CSM) collectively decides in advance how their taxes will be spent each quarter. Every three months, the group gathers to write checks and conduct

a lively discussion about changes in their gasoline usage habits. CSM borrowed the idea from a group in Goshen, Indiana, that started a similar campaign 10 years ago.

Why intentionally pay more for gas than it costs? According to CSM members, this is precisely the point: The price of gas in the U.S. doesn't reflect the actual costs that U.S. society and the global community incur as a result of the country's dependence on oil. Those costs include fossil fuel's contributions to air pollution and global warming. Also hidden at the pump are the costs of U.S. strategies to maintain an inexpensive supply of oil, often through political or military interventions in oil-producing regions—not to mention \$4 billion a year in tax credits and subsidies to Big Oil.

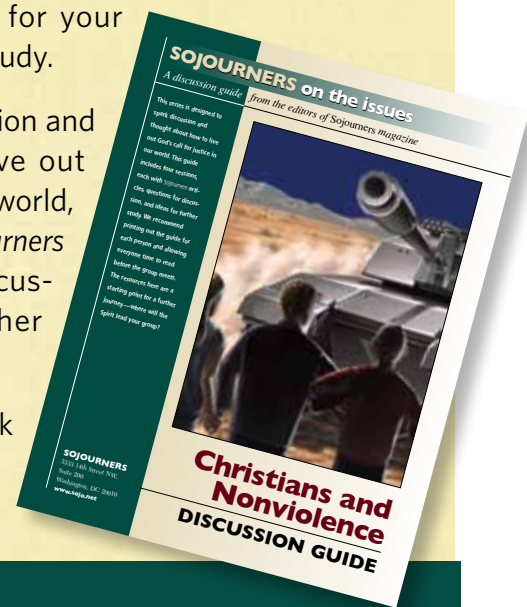
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Sara Nelson-Pallmeyer, the group's treasurer, says that "everyone is paying a different amount—from \$10 to \$385 per month. The fun part is that so far we've given more than \$5,000 to organizations working on alternative transportation solutions and advocating for political change around climate-change issues." She added that, ironically, "The real heroes of the group are the ones paying the least."

Members have already contributed to organizations such as Transit for Livable Communities, Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, Fresh Energy, and 350.org. In the future, they hope to use some "tax" monies to help members pay for bus passes or subsidize a bicycle purchase.

"The dollar or two extra isn't much when you think about it," says CSM member Nils Dybvig. "In Europe, they pay up to \$8 for a gallon of gas. Consumers have responded by buying more fuel-efficient vehicles, and, of course, they've developed more transportation options than we have."

One benefit of the group, Dybvig says, is getting to talk about the challenges of driving less with others committed to doing so: "We each try to carpool more, take the bus, bike, or walk when we can."

Group member Mary Preus says, "If we really believe that God entrusted this wounded Earth to our care, then we need to actively look for ways to be protectors and healers of the planet. The alternative gas tax is just one small step a community of faith can take to send a signal that there are some people out here who are willing to pay more in order to combat climate change."

With the cost of gas likely to play a role in this fall's presidential elections, no candidate seems willing to speak the painful truth that eventually gas prices will need to rise even more. As the gas-tax group members encourage others to follow their example, they hope that changes to the *political* climate will also be a favorable byproduct. ■

Bob Hulteen is editor of *Metro Lutheran in Minneapolis* and a contributing writer to *Sojourners*. **Tom Witt**, a founding member of the *Community of St. Martin*, is a musician with *Bread for the Journey*. To learn more, email gastax@communityofstmartin.org.

What Makes for Sacred Ground?

SUMMER IS HERE, and I am looking forward to ice-cream cones with my kids in the park and long walks in the warm evenings. But I am also remembering the less-than-happy events of two summers back, when Cordoba House (also known as the “Ground Zero mosque”) became the subject of deep controversy in American discourse.

The strangest part of the Cordoba House debate for me was around “sacred ground.” People opposed to Cordoba House insisted that the blocks around Ground Zero constituted a holy area. Those who believed that Cordoba House ought to stay in Lower Manhattan liked to point to the nearby strip joint and off-track betting parlor and say that this patch of land was just like any other.

“Why can’t you just move it 10 or 20 blocks away?” a CNN anchor asked me on air at the height of the controversy. But that would still be sacred ground, I thought to myself.

If the forces of pluralism don’t write the next chapter in the American story, the forces of prejudice will.

A hundred miles north, 1,000 miles south, 2,000 miles west—it’s all holy.

I believe every inch of America is sacred, from sea to shining sea. I believe we make it holy by who we welcome and how we relate to each other. Call it my Muslim eyes on the American project. “We ... made you nations and tribes that you may come to know one another,” says the Quran. While that vision is for all countries, there is no better place to enact it than here. The promise of America is the promise of pluralism, of welcoming the contributions of all communities and fostering right relationship among them.

This ethic is part of the definition



of our nation. “I say democracy is only of use [for elections] that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruits in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between men [and women], and their beliefs—in religion, literature, colleges, and schools ...” sang Walt Whitman.

In *What It Means To Be An American*, Michael Walzer observes that political theorists since the Greeks believed that participatory politics could only exist in ethnically or religiously homogenous nations. “One religious communion, it was argued, made one political community ... One people made one state.” Pluralism—one state with many peoples—existed only under empires. The next section begins with this line: “Except in the United States.”

Human history is littered with examples of different identity groups at war with each other. More frequently than the faithful would like to admit, religious belief has often fueled the fighting. Against this backdrop, the American achievement, while far from perfect, is still remarkable.

As Barack Obama said in his inaugural address: “Our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this earth.”

But, as the Cordoba House discourse showed all too clearly, the forces of prejudice are alive and well in America. Those of us who believe that all of America constitutes the sacred ground of welcoming cannot be content with past progress or favorable comparisons to other nations. If the forces of pluralism don’t write the next chapter in the American story, we forfeit the terrain to the forces of prejudice. ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American. His new book, Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America, will be published this fall.





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Fighting the Real Enemy: Fear

SIHAM ABU AWWAD grew up in a Palestinian family in a small West Bank village. When Siham was 14, her mother was imprisoned for six months for demonstrating against the military occupation of the West Bank. Siham became the woman of the house, caring for her four brothers—Khaled, Youssef, Ali, and Maha.

With their mother in jail, Siham and her brothers became very close. “We had a special place in each other’s heart,” she told me. Missing her mother, and with little time for friends, Siham became especially close to Youssef. “I told him everything. He was kind and sensitive. He was like a sister!”

When Siham’s mother returned from prison, she continued her political activism and was soon arrested

While preparing a celebration for Ali’s return, Youssef was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint. “Youssef was our angel,” said Siham, “always with a smile.”

When Siham’s mother returned from Saudi Arabia, she immediately joined the Parents Circle-Families Forum, an organization of 600 Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost a family member to the conflict. Siham’s mother began talking about reconciliation, but Siham would have none of it. She told her mother, “If I see the soldier who killed Youssef, I will kill him.” For four years Siham pushed her mother away, angry that she refused to seek revenge.

Then, suddenly, her mother died of a stroke. During the period of mourning, a group of Jewish women from the Parents Circle came to visit Siham. Strangely, one of the Jewish women looked exactly like Siham’s mother. “I thought, this is just like my mom to send me a message through a Jewish woman!” When the woman saw a slight smile on Siham’s face, she hugged her. “I needed that hug,” said Siham. “I thought, if she has my mother’s face, maybe she has my mother’s heart. I fell in love with that whole group of Jewish women.”

Siham wishes her mother were alive to see that she—and her brothers Khaled and Ali—are active members of the Parents Circle. “It’s hard to open our wounds to each other the way we do. But we—Palestinians and Israelis—have one goal. We want a different life. We want to stop killing each other.” Siham believes that what really killed her mother was the pain of losing Youssef. “I



Christine Anderson

don’t want more mothers to die of that kind of pain.”

The only Jewish faces Siham had seen while growing up were soldiers’ faces. “When I was young I never thought of them as a human being with a heart, with a mother and a father,” she said. “I just saw their gun.” Today she sees them the way she wants to be seen: as human beings who deserve to live.

Today, if Siham met the soldier who killed Youssef, she would invite him to her house to meet her family. “I understand now that my greatest enemy is the soldier’s fear. His head is filled with many ideas about me that aren’t true. I want to give him another view of me and my family, so he doesn’t need to fear us.”

Siham taught herself English so she could tell her story. I met her in Chicago with Robi Damelin, an Israeli Jewish woman. I watched them whisper and laugh and offer each other a quick hug as they headed off for another meeting where they describe their loss, their pain, and their commitment to seeing each other’s humanity and embracing the journey of reconciliation. ■

Lynne Hybels, co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is author of Nice Girls Don’t Change the World.

“That’s just like my mom, to send me a message through a Jewish woman!”

again, but she maintained a sense of humor and challenged her children to be kind and good.

The establishment of a nearby Jewish settlement led to ongoing seizures of land from Siham’s village, and there were frequent protests. By the time Siham was 17, her mother and all her brothers had been in and out of jail for participating in the protests that are illegal under Israeli law. Knowing she would likely be imprisoned again and concerned for her daughter’s future, Siham’s mother encouraged her to marry. Siham did, and eventually gave birth to five children.

Youssef and Ali both married too, but happiness was short-lived. Two months after his wedding, Ali was shot in the leg by a settler. Doctors wanted to amputate his leg and feared he would not survive, but his mother arranged treatment in Saudi Arabia, where Ali’s life and his leg were saved.



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Sandi Willard

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justice.”**

BREAKING THE BUBBLE WRAP

We may be tempted to quarantine our children from the scary world out there—but it's better to nurture an incurable, chronic, and healing passion for justice.



"TAMARA" GREW UP in an affluent, middle-to-upper-class neighborhood. Her friends, including the ones she knew from church, were her cousins, neighbors, and other kids who were a lot like her. Her parents worked hard at building a "safe zone" to protect her from harm—but, as Tamara looks back on her childhood, she

can see the lasting fear that it instilled in her.

After she got her driver's license, she always double-checked that her car doors were locked as soon as she was in the vehicle, and she avoided her city's small downtown area. To this day, she detests large cities and is constantly worried that someone will rob her. Tamara suffers from "mean world" syndrome: a hyper-vigilant state in which strangers are to be ignored and avoided, new experiences are to be feared, and other people's problems are just that. It's a survival mode based on scarcity, hoarding, looking out for number one. Too often, it involves shrinking back from active involvement in the biblical call to social justice.

Sadly, many parents put children in a kind of quarantine—not seeking justice, but fearing contamination. The view that children are pure and the world is corrupt has led well-intentioned adults to (over)protect children from poverty, disease, violence, and other "pollutants." (Of course, this isn't to say that all children grow up sheltered; many experience situations of poverty, violence, and oppression that sheltered families can't even imagine.) Ironically, as children are quarantined from the harmful realities of the world, they're often exposed to virtual violence through television, music, and video games. This is a recipe for creating kids who, like Tamara, are afraid of the unknown that exists beyond their bubble-wrapped microcosms.

Clearly, we need another perspective of childhood, one that acknowledges children's full humanity and recognizes their capacity to do wrong *and* to do good, including seeking justice. While we want to keep kids safe, we also want them

At right, children participating in an after-school youth development program at the Perry School, in a violence-torn neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The school offers a holistic approach to child wellness and development, including a "peace room" for teaching nonviolence and conflict resolution.

Yvette Mitchell





Children participate in trust exercises—that are also lots of fun—led by Little Friends for Peace at an interfaith church camp in Maryland.

Little Friends for Peace photo

to follow the way of Jesus, which is sometimes downright dangerous. While we want our kids to be good, true goodness only develops through a struggle against what's wrong—both inside them and around them. This perspective helps us affirm children's inherent agency, their ability to make sense of the world around them and to express themselves.

CHRISTIAN PARENTS, grandparents, and educators today need to ask what we and

churches, focuses on being good people, good members of our denominations, good citizens—all good things. But often the more personal, experiential dimensions of faith remain marginal, while institutional dimensions remain primary. As a result, if kids aren't natural joiners, they can drift away. Not only that, but they can be left unprepared for situations where Christian convictions call us to stand *against* the status quo.

In both pietistic and institutional paradigms, traditional churches have worked

While we want to keep kids safe, we also want them to follow the sometimes-dangerous way of Jesus.

our churches are showing emerging generations about what it means to be followers of Christ. Many of us, whether Catholic, Protestant, or from other backgrounds, live within traditional paradigms that increasingly don't fit.

Our more pietistic religious paradigm, often found in evangelical churches, focuses on who goes to heaven and who goes to hell; it emphasizes personal relationship with Jesus, but struggles to integrate a radical concern for the poor, for the planet, and for peacemaking. This paradigm's default assumptions have often (so far at least) kept these churches compliant to the Religious Right. If children don't adopt conservative political and economic affinities, they often drop out of such churches.

Meanwhile, the more institutional paradigm, often dominant in mainline Protestant

hard to teach children Bible stories and Christian virtues; many of us wouldn't be the adults we are today if it weren't for the great start we got in the churches of our childhood. But in today's world we need to rethink what it means to, in Paul's words, raise new generations "in the nurture and instruction of the Lord," including the social, economic, and political dimensions of that instruction. How can we shape our kids' characters to help them become Christ-followers who are both contemplative and activist? As we imagine what this might look like, a few questions come to mind.

What would happen if we get children talking about justice and injustice?

Instead of shielding children from the harsh realities of injustice, we need to orient them to our complex world of moral beauty,

danger, and opportunity. Gradually, and in age-appropriate ways, we can make justice a matter of daily conversation.

This process often begins with the essential quality of gratitude. For example, the Matthews family, which used to recite a simple prayer before dinner, recently began to extend thanksgivings beyond the food by giving each person a moment to offer additional words of gratitude: "Tonight I am thankful that we feel safe." "Today I'm thankful that I have a dog to love." "I'm thankful that I have lots of friends, especially Martin and Chris." Building on this foundation, the Matthews parents are talking with their children about other families who don't enjoy those blessings and about the ways society subtly pressures people to seek pleasure or comfort for themselves rather than the common good of all. Now, bedtime prayers often include spontaneous intercession for others in need.

Many organizations produce materials to help families engage these subjects (see "On a Firm Foundation," page 22). Daily life provides plenty of teachable moments as well: Adults can talk with young people about music videos that portray women as sex objects or reality shows that reinforce sexual and racial stereotypes. Movies, advertisements, and news headlines all provide parents and adolescents unlimited opportunity to uncover hidden messages and warped ideas about injustice and privilege. There are also positive examples that attempt to shatter unjust stereotypes: Parents can follow the lead of youth leaders who employ films such as *Napoleon Dynamite*, *Miss Representation*, *Avatar*, and *Bully* as springboards for discussions about welcoming the stranger, sexism, environmental concern, and other issues.

Most important, let's not forget that, since young people learn through observation and participation, we adults need to talk about our experiences. During dinner-time conversation, a commute, or a walk, we can share our own struggles in seeking justice—on the job, during an election, among a circle of friends, even at church. We can ask kids for their advice and invite them to share their own struggles and breakthroughs. Simple queries such as, "Did you have a chance to serve somebody

Continued on Page 20

'CROON HER TO SLEEP WITH FREEDOM SONGS'

The goal of social justice parenting is not to produce the "right" kind of child—it is to create an environment in which love flourishes • by ANNE MARIE RODERICK

HOW DO YOU get your kid to care about social justice? Well, you can bring her to marches and protests on important issues before she's old enough to walk; croon her to sleep with freedom songs; or fill her Christmas stocking with fair-trade goodies.

My parents did all that when I was little. Some of my earliest memories involve talking to homeless people in my neighborhood, attending demonstrations with my church, door-to-door lobbying with my mom, even dressing up as Winnie the Pooh on a couple occasions to raise awareness about corporate child labor practices. But these events were just the side effects of having activist Christian parents; they say little about our family life and my own formation as a young person.

Perhaps one of the keys to social justice parenting is to ignore the question above.

You can't get your kid to care about social justice issues. Much like you can't force your child to be a Christian, to dress a certain way, or to listen to certain music, you can't set out with a goal to shape your child's passions and interests. Parents who do this either get lucky or, more likely, meet strong resistance from their young ones. My father tells me that the question parents *should* continuously ask themselves is this: How can I reflect a vision for a more just and compassionate society within my family?

The goal of social justice parenting is not to produce the "right" kind of child—it is to create an environment in which love flourishes and the structures of family life are consistent with a vision for a better world. In my family, this meant that we functioned democratically (or, to my 4-year-old mind, with everyone "on board"). For the most part, we made decisions at weekly family meetings in which everyone had an equal opportunity to participate. My parents tried not to use age, education level, and income as trump cards for important family matters.



The author, at age 11, may have been a Bear of Very Little Brain, but she was wise to corporate child labor practices.

That is, we rarely heard the phrases: "Because I said so," or, "Because I know more than you do," or "Because it's my money."

We had an understanding in our family that each member should contribute according to his or her abilities. My sister and I weren't expected to contribute to our household financially, but we were expected to help out and be present. (Although now, when my sister and I are home on vacation, I've heard my parents say more than once that they wish they had made us do more chores when we were little. They're probably right.)

We were always allowed and encouraged to communicate our feelings honestly. We were never told to stop being angry, to stop crying, to accept what we were told without question or clarification. In a space where communication is safe and open, there are

opportunities for transformative discussions. Today, I still talk with my parents about most things, and we have great social and political debates.

My mother remembers that she and my father had to be careful not to let their passion for social justice issues lead to neglectful parenting. While my parents could have spent a lot more time at meetings or other events, they made conscious efforts to be home for our family. They didn't want us to resent the work they did in the world. Instead, they wanted to reflect their love and commitment for our family in the work choices they made.

Christian social justice parenting will look different in each family. And so will the formation of children. Ultimately, each young person chooses her own passions, her own perspective, and her own lifework. Parents have an important role to play in helping their children live into their full potential—that's what justice parenting is all about. ■

Anne Marie Roderick is editorial assistant at Sojourners.

Family photo

Continued from Page 18

in some way today?” or “Did you see any examples of injustice today?” can make important conversations commonplace.

What would happen if we orient children to the Bible as a book about justice and compassion?

One mom had the chance to make a simple Bible story come alive when, on a trip to the grocery store, she and her young kids encountered a disoriented elderly woman in the store parking lot. The mom reminded her children about the Bible story they had read recently about God hearing the children of Israel's cries when they were enslaved in



We hold Moses and David up as examples in some ways, but forbid our kids to follow them in others.

Egypt. “We learned that God cares about people who are in trouble,” she said. “So what do you think God wants us to do for this woman?” “We have to try to help her, Mom!” one of the children responded. They helped the lady find her way home, and in the process experienced the truth that Bible stories are to be lived, not just learned.

It's not always so straightforward, though. Few adults realize how morally complex the Bible can be for children. Abraham has multiple wives; Moses and Joshua command religious violence; David throws stones and kills people. We hold these leaders up as examples in some ways, but forbid our kids to follow them in other ways. In response to this problem, many people are exploring a new teaching paradigm where, rather than presenting single Bible stories, we link them together to show God's ongoing pedagogy of the human race. We can point out to children, for example, how David's violence disqualified him from building God's temple, and how Jesus—our ultimate nonviolent example—created a new kind of temple made from reconciled human lives. This approach takes us beyond both absolutism (where each isolated story is supposed to present a timeless moral lesson) and relativism (where each story is ambiguous and conflicted). It renders the Bible a library that portrays humanity on a journey toward justice, compassion, and peace.

This approach helped Rick guide his son, Jake, when Jake wanted to treat a neighborhood bully to a taste of his own violent medicine. Rick recalled the story of David, praising his courage in standing up to Goliath, but then talking about the negative consequences for David of a life of violence. Rick helped Jake imagine what might happen if Jake successfully beat up the bully: The bully would want revenge, and so would his friends. After imagining what it would be like to get caught up in a cycle of violence, Jake eventually decided to look for an alternative that involved both courage *and* nonviolence, and Rick helped him work that process through.

What would happen if children got to know people in different circumstances?

Getting to know people living amid poverty, violence, racism, and other injustices is often an important part of social justice education. Over the last few years, for example, Shelly and Tom have taken their teenage kids on three mission trips to a Guatemalan village, where they have become friends with some children and teenagers. Poverty never again will be an abstraction for them (and Spanish won't just be a subject to study, but will be a vital necessity as they prepare for their next trip).

Now Shelly and Tom are wondering how they can forge relationships across economic, racial, and social lines in their own

city. Sometimes, they've learned, it's easier to go across an ocean than it is to go across town. But despite the difficulty, it's valuable to seek out “friendship greenhouses” where young people can get to know those who don't look like them, who practice different religions or no religion, who live in different parts of our towns and cities, and who know what privilege is because they lack it.

What would happen if we followed our children's lead?

Children often ignite sparks in us for “seeking first the kingdom of God” in the world. With their honesty, curiosity, concern for fairness, and fresh eyes, children help us see problems that are so commonplace that we have become blind to them.

We need young people to point out the homeless woman begging for money. We need them to point out our hypocrisy when, in the heat of an argument, we make a rash statement. In moments like these when children are bearers of inconvenient truths, will we tell them to be quiet, or will we, like Jesus, say “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children”?

What would happen if our children helped determine our families' and churches' justice agendas?

Respecting children goes beyond educating them about justice: It also means letting them get down to business chipping away at injustice.

Many families have some sort of practice or agenda for justice-seeking, like sponsoring a child, volunteering at an assisted-living center, or writing letters to political leaders. These are all great practices for cultivating a spirit of Christ-centered justice-seeking. But what if we gave children opportunities to choose how our families and churches might work for justice? Instead of telling children how to seek justice, we can apprentice them into Jesus' band of justice-seekers by letting them decide how—as a family or church—we can do our part to stamp out poverty, end domestic violence, or improve conditions for migrant farm workers.

More than once a child's idea has sparked social change. To name just a few high-profile

Continued from Page 22

GARDENERS OF YOUTH

Nurturing the life of children, from stage to stage • by CATHERINE MARESCA

WE WHO nurture the life of children could be compared to gardeners, conscientiously serving the God-given stages of the growing plant. We seek to support its development as a seedling, a young plant, and a fruit-bearing or mature plant.

However, Christian educators of young children often begin to water, weed, and prune without first observing children to grasp the stages of their relationship with God. God has planned human and spiritual growth just as well as God has prepared plant growth.

Catholic scholar Sofia Cavalletti and her collaborators Gianna Gobbi and others around the world and in many denominations have carefully observed the stages of newborn to 12 year-old children's relationship with God, and they have developed an approach to religious formation, called the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, that serves those stages well. The encounter with God over the years includes coming to know God who is love, God who is personal, and God who is just and merciful, as these and other aspects of God match the developmental strengths of the growing child.

Here is that development and its implications in very broad strokes:

■ **AGES 0 TO 6.** Young children are in a relationship of love with God. This begins with life. This time is one of joy. For the young child, Christianity is not about doing good, but about being in love with Jesus. We serve this period with parables such as the good shepherd, the found sheep, the mustard seed, the pearl of great price, and the leaven, as well as the narratives of the birth of Christ, the Last Supper, and the women at the tomb. The signs of God's presence through water, bread, and wine are also introduced according to the practice of each congregation.

The gift of these children to us is their focus on the heart of our faith—the love of God, God's presence with us through Christ, the power of the kingdom of God, the mystery of death and resurrection.

■ **AGES 6 TO 12.** Elementary children are ready to connect their relationships with others to their relationship with God. This begins the great work of sorting out good



Photo courtesy CFMS

A young student at Christian Family Montessori School in Washington, D.C., works with materials as part of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

from bad, right from wrong, and becoming part of the non-violent work of God among us, transforming evil and death into life with patient love. These children seek to grasp the work of God in both time and space—throughout history and among all people.

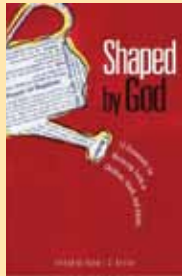
We serve them with universal and inclusive images such as the true vine, the history of the kingdom of God, and the breaking of the bread, as well as moral parables and sayings of Jesus to support children's moral formation. Their gift to us is their open-hearted sense of communion with God, with creation, and with all people. They are vegetarians, peacemakers, and steadfast visionaries of the *shalom* of the reign of God.

A final note. God acted and spoke in history, but rarely explained. God's gifts were freely shared so that each generation could explore them for their meaning in our lives. Our work with children must be done as respectfully as God's work with us. We put these stories and signs in the hands of children with materials that allow them to reflect on their meaning at their own pace, drawing their own conclusions. After a brief introduction we withdraw from their work, allowing the Holy Spirit to "teach." To attempt to control children's understanding of God is a bit like trying to tug on the plants in our care to make them grow. ■

Catherine Maresca is the founder and director of the Center for Children and Theology in Washington, D.C.

ON A FIRM FOUNDATION

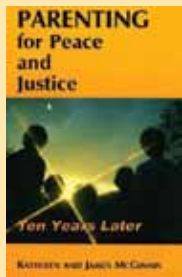
Resources to help you raise happy and engaged kids.



Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults, edited by Robert J. Keeley. A dozen authors tell how to foster faith formation at different ages, spanning topics including story, worship, intergenerational community, and developmental disabilities. Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010

Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children Using Story, Ritual, and Relationship, by Ivy

Beckwith. This slim volume, written from an emerging church perspective, offers strategies for parents and ministers to enlist children's imaginations for the "hope and magnificent love of God's kingdom." Baker Books, 2010



Parenting for Peace and Justice: Ten Years Later, by James and Kathleen McGinnis. This classic volume argues that nonviolent, nonmaterialistic kids don't just happen; they are nurtured by hands-on family participation in helping others. Out of print, but available used. Orbis Books, 1990

MennoMedia, publisher for the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite churches, produces materials including picture books, young adult fiction, and biographies

infused with Mennonite themes such as peacemaking, God's presence in trouble, and creation care. www.mpn.net

Teaching Tolerance from the Southern Poverty Law Center offers *Beyond the Golden Rule*, a free, downloadable guide for parents to help children and teens reject prejudice. Teachers' resources, including *Teaching Tolerance* magazine, are also available. tolerance.org



Maryknoll Magazine draws stories from the work of Maryknoll priests, sisters, brothers, and lay missionaries around the world, bringing to life global issues from a Catholic social teaching perspective. Each issue has two downloadable classroom discussion guides. maryknollmagazine.org

The Share Lent Solidarity Calendar, from the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, is a free, day-by-day Lenten journey to

help families reflect on how their lifestyles affect our planet and families in the global South. devp.org/sharelent

Love Isn't Enough is a blog featuring candid, anti-racist parenting discussion, including responses to current events. loveisntenough.com

Improve Communication: Lessons from One Family's Experiments in Conflict, Parenting, and Love. Practical tips for dealing with family conflicts. improvecommunication.net

—Compiled by Elizabeth Palmberg

Continued from Page 20

examples, Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani boy who escaped from debt bondage, became an anti-slavery advocate; reading his story in the newspaper inspired Craig Kielburger, a 12-year-old in Ontario, Canada, to start Free the Children, an international education and development nonprofit. Seeing a homeless man looking for food in a trash can motivated another Canadian child, Hannah Taylor, to start the Ladybug Foundation, which raises awareness and support for homeless shelters and food banks.

What would happen if we helped our children speak up for children?

For countless kids around the world, learning about injustice isn't an option—it's a fact of life they have to endure every day, while lacking the legal rights reserved for adults. If we help our children feel solidarity with fellow children, as Craig did with Iqbal, they stand a good chance of catching an incurable, chronic, and healing passion for justice.

Jesus said that whenever we welcome a little child in his name, we welcome him. When we speak out against injustices that harm children, we speak out for Jesus. And when we take the hand of the little child who has no other hand to grasp, we are taking Jesus' hand.

In her song "Paradigm," Ani DiFranco remembers how, when she was a child, her parents demonstrated their understanding that citizenship brings responsibilities beyond voting. She describes holding her mother's hand as they went campaigning door to door, being "in a room full of women licking stamps and laughing"—and also seeing that "there's a paradox in every paradigm."

Let's make sure that when the children in our families, churches, and communities grow up and look back on their younger days, they can join DiFranco in saying, "I remember the feeling of community brewing / Of democracy happening." As we resign from our role as bubble-wrappers and take up the task of being character-formers, we can open up creative new possibilities for exploring the biblical call to social justice. ■

David M. Csinos, author of *Children's Ministry That Fits*, is a doctoral student in practical theology at the University of Toronto.

Brian D. McLaren is an author, speaker, and activist based in southwest Florida. His next book, *Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Walk into a Bar: Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World*, will be published in September 2012.

Witness

There is nothing casual
about casualties of war.

It is serious business deciding
which of the wounded
get Medevac'd or left behind
on the battlefield.

It is not the ones
with the most severe of injuries
who are transported
elsewhere for treatment

but the ones with the best
chance of surviving them
that make the trip.

"There's nothing we can do."

Try telling this
to a fellow soldier
about their buddy in arms
whose last letter they have
safely tucked away

just in case.

Try telling their mother, father;
sister, brother; son, daughter;
or spouse

that someone else's mother,
father, sister, brother, son, daughter
or spouse

was picked instead.

No one envies the Medic
who must make this choice.

But sometimes even the chosen
don't survive their journey home.

Maritza Rivera, a Puerto Rican poet living in Maryland, is author of *A Mother's War*, written during her son's two military tours in Iraq.



Oregon Army National Guard photo

PEACE



MISSION CREEP

Is surveillance of churches and peace groups on the rise again?

ON JAN. 25, 2011, Jacob Flowers left work early to get to a meeting. The organization where Flowers serves as executive director, Mid-South Peace and Justice Center, has been involved in community organizing since 1982. Although not officially affiliated with any religious body, the Center works closely with the faith community and is housed in a large building owned by First Congregational Church, a United Church of Christ community in Memphis.

While a snowstorm swirled outside, Mid-South's organizing director, Brad Watkins, presided over an afternoon workshop in which anyone who was interested could come in and complete Freedom of Information Act requests about FBI surveillance. Activists decided that a FOIA-themed workshop would be a good way to stand in solidarity with anti-war and pro-Palestinian activists in the Midwest whose homes had been raided by the FBI the year before. Since the workshop attracted only a modest crowd of peace activists, nothing could have been more alarming than the arrival of three unexpected guests—black-clad agents from the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

"We suspected that they found a way to get into the building," Flowers recalled in an interview, "because normally the building is locked up pretty tight." The FBI agents explained that they were there to warn the owners of the property of an impending protest. Watkins informed them that it was a workshop, not a protest, and that they were currently looking at the people responsible for organizing it. As soon as Watkins began asking if they were trying to harass citizens concerned about FBI repression, the agents quickly left.

Flowers returned to Mid-South's offices around 3 p.m. to discover nearly a dozen police vehicles on the block surrounding the church and patrolling First Congregational's parking lot. He also noticed that a black SUV with tinted windows was idling across the street from the church—one of five such vehicles on the scene. Phone calls to the Memphis Police Department (MPD) determined that the



“The system is empowering those who view the constitutional rights of free speech and assembly as a threat to national security.”

department had learned of a planned protest and had sent officers to “keep the peace.” Someone at the local FBI office told Flowers that the only FBI agents on the scene that day had been the three who entered the offices.

Two weeks later, MPD’s deputy chief Dave Martello wrote a memo saying that the department never gave instructions for officers to conduct surveillance on the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center. The police presence was simply a routine response to events like protests and marches. The fact that so many SWAT units were sent, Martello maintained, was simply due to a “communication breakdown.”

But Flowers, a Memphis native whose activist parents were among the many Mid-South activists under FBI surveillance in the 1980s, doesn’t buy it. “I’ve been involved in a lot of direct action in this city,” said Flowers, who has been working at Mid-South since 2004, “and this is the first time we’ve ever seen this kind of police presence anywhere.”

In the weeks following the incident, Flowers and his group requested and received documents from the MPD that showed that the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation Fusion Center (a local, state, and federal joint task-force “for the timely receipt, analysis, and dissemination of terrorism information and criminal activity relating to Tennessee,” according to its website) had gotten wind of Mid-South’s FOIA workshop. Fusion Center agents placed a call to MPD headquarters on the morning of Jan. 25 to make police aware of the impending “protest”; their concerns about Mid-South were mentioned in the morning command briefing.

Although Flowers allows that the whole incident could have been the result of a misunderstanding, part of him thinks that it was related to Mid-South’s commitment to standing up for victims of police brutality. While the Center has had positive relations with the police in the past, Flowers mentions having a tense relationship with former director of police services Larry Godwin.

“We’ve had a lot of run-ins with Godwin over the years in cases of police brutality that we’ve taken on. So, in some ways this could be a little personal.” (Godwin is currently deputy commissioner for Tennessee’s Department of Safety and Homeland Security, which oversees the Tennessee Highway Patrol. The THP came under fire

last November when it was revealed that troopers had gone undercover to infiltrate Occupy Nashville protests.)

While Flowers says he has no reason to expect more trouble from the Memphis police, what happened to Mid-South seems to be just the most recent example of non-violent activists—many motivated by deep religious convictions—treated as threats to public order.

■ From 2002 until 2005, agents from the FBI’s Pittsburgh office conducted surveillance on the Thomas Merton Center, a coalition-building organization dedicated to nonviolence and social justice. FBI agents filed reports on the group’s anti-war demonstrations under the heading “International Terrorism Matters.”

■ In 2005, NBC and other news outlets reported that the Department of Defense had included anti-war protests in its Threat and Local Observation Notices (TALON) database. Documents show that among the 13,000 records in the database (which was shut down in 2008) was information on a Catholic Worker house in New York City and on Quakers protesting military recruitment in Ohio and Illinois.

■ In 2006, the ACLU of Maryland secured the release of documents showing that agents working with the Maryland State Police (MSP) logged nearly 300 hours infiltrating nonviolent protest groups across the state. Additionally, two Catholic sisters from the Dominican order, who are active in the anti-nuclear Plowshares movement, were entered into an MSP criminal database as “terrorists.”

■ In 2011, New York City Police Department’s surveillance of Occupy Wall Street protests reached the pews of city churches. Following the ban on overnight sleeping in Zuccotti Park, several Upper West Side churches opened their doors to protesters. On at least two occasions last fall, officers from the NYPD’s intelligence division entered the United Methodist Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew on West 86th Street, asking about protesters and counting the number of protesters sleeping on pews.

People of faith seem to have been targeted for repression just as much in years past as they are today. Beginning in the



1940s, an alphabet soup of government agencies—including the FBI, CIA, and IRS—tried to expose the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) as a “communist front.”

During the Vietnam War, unknown assailants went much further when they fire-bombed the Quaker House in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and the AFSC office in Miami. In 1973-74, a string of burglaries in Washington, D.C., saw AFSC-related files rifled and stolen, while valuables went untouched.

From October 1969 to February 1970, during the investigation of a progressive United Church of Christ-affiliated community coalition, Chicago police deployed 31 agents to report on 235 clergy and 161 churches. The city’s “red squad” also recruited parishioners to serve as spies, a tactic they used to investigate the Methodist Federation for Social Action’s alleged ties to “communist front” groups.

During the 1980s, many churches and other opponents of U.S. policies in Central America were subjected to government surveillance. Then-*Boston Globe* journalist Ross Gelbspan documented nearly 200 cases from that period in which churches and activists became targets for burglaries, harassment, and intimidation.

While one can trace some common threads linking the surveillance strategies of earlier years to those of today, there are signs that security agencies are engaging in new tactics.

In 2009, the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks published an intelligence manual from the U.S. Army’s Military Police School. WikiLeaks’s analysis of the document reveals that “the U.S. Army is using structuring tricks to work around intelligence oversight rules that would normally prevent domestic spying.”

Parts of the manual suggest that the Army developed these loopholes based on a little-known Washington state case involving John Towery.

In 2007, Towery, a civilian working for the U.S. Army’s Fort Lewis Force Protection Division near Olympia, Washington, went undercover, posing as an anarchist, to infiltrate an anti-war group. Recruited by a detective working for the Pierce County Sheriff, Towery was officially doing his spy work “off-hours” and not on behalf of

WE’RE WATCHING YOU...

Between 2003 and 2006, the Pentagon database TALON kept tabs on thousands of “potential threats,” including the following peace and anti-war groups:



- Catholic Worker
- War Resisters League
- United for Peace and Justice
- Voices in the Wilderness
- Brooklyn Parents for Peace
- Park Slope Greens
- Not in Our Name
- Progressive Programmers League
- Kairos Community
- Code Pink
- World War III Arts in Action
- No Police State Coalition
- Veterans for Peace
- Rhode Island Community Coalition for Peace
- Broward Anti-War Coalition
- Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition
- International Action Center
- Students for Peace and Justice
- Iraq Veterans Against the War
- Military Families Speak Out
- Campus Anti-War Network
- American Friends Service Committee
- Western Massachusetts Military Recruitment Education Network
- Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Berkeley Stop the War Coalition
- Georgia State University Students for Peace and Justice

Source: “No Real Threat: ACLU Report on the Pentagon’s Secret Database” (2007)

the Army. However, records released to *The Olympian* newspaper show that both the Army and local law enforcement were kept constantly apprised of Towery’s activities.

Drew Hendricks, an activist whose name turns up frequently in the intelligence reports, told me in an email that he believes those “structuring tricks” had a unique purpose. “We think the relationship Towery had with Pierce County was essentially a conspiracy to try to skirt the Posse Comitatus Act,” a federal law that forbids the military from carrying out domestic law enforcement activities against U.S. citizens.

Going by the spy name “John Jacobs,” Towery successfully infiltrated Olympia Port Militarization Resistance (OlyPMR), a group that used nonviolent direct action to block the shipment of military cargo to Iraq. Hendricks describes Towery as having been an active and ambitious member of the group, even serving as one of the group’s email moderators from 2007 to 2009. But Towery’s persistent lobbying for leadership roles may have been motivated by a desire to disrupt the group’s activities. “He took on meeting coordination in the Tacoma area,” Hendricks relates, “and *never once* set a meeting place or location there. Accepted the work, then non-performed.”

Shortly after Towery’s true identity was revealed in 2009, members of OlyPMR filed a federal lawsuit against him and his handlers, alleging that the Army violated their civil rights. The case is ongoing.

DID FATHER DANIEL Berrigan have it right when he chalked up the counter-intelligence dragnet of the 1960s to “a way of ensuring that the death game goes on, and that those who resist it be known and punished”? Why do government security agencies spy on citizens engaged in nonviolent protest?

For answers I turned to Matthew Hidek, an Army veteran and former geospatial intelligence planner who worked with the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense. “The domestic security network has been set up to intentionally bend or break the rules,” said Hidek, who left his government work in 2004 and now teaches at Cazenovia College in upstate New York. “So what we see is a form of mission creep. As a result, the system itself is



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Sojourners has already won awards for its new website design. And for good reason: It's better organized, easier to use, and much faster to find what you want from Sojourners' 40 years of publishing for biblical justice. Join us, and find own your voice @ sojo.net.

- Action alerts • SojoMail • Sojourners magazine
- God's Politics blog • Resources • Special events

empowering those who view the constitutional rights of free speech and assembly as a threat to national security.”

Given that a large proportion of those involved with anti-war and social justice work come from the faith community, it is not surprising that many of them end up in today's terrorism databases. Within the Pentagon's TALON database, there were 186 entries dealing with “anti-military protests,” including counter-recruitment activities carried out by Quakers working for the AFSC.

Tracking activists of faith is driven by a perverse logic, according to Christopher Pyle, an Army intelligence whistleblower in

“Military intelligence can't seem to understand that Quakers are notoriously nonviolent.”

the 1970s and currently professor of constitutional law at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. “Military intelligence can't seem to understand that Quakers are notoriously nonviolent,” Pyle said in an interview. “Their protests against military recruitment are no more threatening than a burning draft card, which is precisely why the military won't stop spying on them.”

If there is a silver lining to stories of harassment and surveillance by police and FBI agents, it is that such tactics *sometimes* end up energizing rather than repressing activists. Pat Elder, a Maryland organizer whose lobbying against military recruitment in schools eventually led to the passage of a landmark state law in 2010, viewed his inclusion in the Maryland State Police database as “a badge of honor.” In Memphis, the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center used video footage of their run-in with the police to push the MPD to undergo an internal audit. However, more often than not, such repressive tactics thwart a far greater number of citizens from raising their voices in the public arena. ■

Seth Kershner is a freelance writer and researcher based in Western Massachusetts. He is the co-author (with Scott Harding) of “Just Say No: Organizing Against Militarism in Public Schools,” which appeared last summer in the Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare. He and Harding are currently at work on a book-length study of the counter-recruitment movement.

The Mother of Mujerista Theology

ADA MARÍA ISASI-DÍAZ often quipped that she “was born a feminist on Thanksgiving weekend in 1975,” when she attended the first Women’s Ordination Conference in Detroit. At the time of her unexpected death in May at age 69, after fighting an aggressive cancer, she was acknowledged as the full-fledged mother of *mujerista* theology and recognized around the world for her critical contribution in shaping a feminist liberation theology for Latinas in the United States.

Ada was “a pioneer,” Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether told *Sojourners*. “She gave us a vision of justice and integrity for Latina women in the U.S. and the world that was inspiring”; her work is “an integral part of feminist theological thought.”

Ada María Isasi-Díaz was born in Cuba in 1943, the third of six sisters and two brothers. Her father worked in the sugar cane mills, and her mother nourished in Ada a love of Catholic religious practices and the importance of staying

to be only about God in the abstract, but should include what people *know* about God and how they acquire that knowledge. In this way she identified Latinas and their community, traditions, habits, moral judgments, and self-definition as the primary source material for learning about

their God experience. By relocating her primary theological sources out of the academy and to the kitchens, laundromats, home altars, and *familias* of Latina women, Ada flipped the locus of power, authority, and agency.

“She enlisted the words of Latinas in both their work and in their resistance,” said Gabriel Salguero, her first archivist and now president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition. “She was a pioneer because she gave voice to an authentic struggle for dignity amidst the exploitation of Latina women in their work as domestics. She had a capacity to develop people in speech, to bring forth voice, both with them and on their behalf.”

Ada returned from Peru in 1969 and left the Ursuline Order. In the early 1970s, she worked as a tutor, finished her bachelor’s, taught high school in South Louisiana, and spent 16 months in Spain. In 1975, she was living in New York and had been working as a sales clerk at Sears. Ada’s friend Denise Mack insisted she attend a women’s conference in Detroit. Ada had no money for the travel, hotel, or registration—but went anyway. At the conference’s closing liturgy, the presidents asked all women called to ordination to a renewed priestly ministry within the Catholic Church to stand.



Ada recalled that she was at the front of the auditorium. “I didn’t want to stand. I’m tired of battles. But I knew I had to be honest and stand.” When she looked behind her she said, “I found myself surrounded by a ‘cloud of witnesses.’” This would be a struggle in which she would

File photo

not be alone.

In 1988 she published *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* with Yolanda Tarango. It was one of the first theological books from a Latina perspective published in the U.S. For 37 years, Ada María Isasi-Díaz forged a community of women’s voices—with Latina theological experience and wisdom at its center—and fought fiercely for its recognition within the academy. More important, she empowered Latina working as domestics, in *maquilas* (factories), and in the fields with the courage to define themselves. Latinas dedicated to a preferential option for women found a name: *mujeristas*.

“The concept of struggle, *la lucha*, and the name of Ada María Isasi-Díaz will always go together,” New Testament scholar Fernando Segovia told *Sojourners*. “This was a struggle that she inherited from the political legacy of exile and alienation ... and a struggle for which she empowered many along the way. She waged it with profound conviction, steadfast determination, and unrelenting hope.” Ada María—presente! ■

Rose Marie Berger, author of the book *Who Killed Donte Manning?* (available at store. sojo.net), is a Catholic peace activist and a *Sojourners* associate editor.



Remembering Ada María Isasi-Díaz

in the struggle (*la lucha*) for what one believes. Her family fled Cuba after years of civil war, and in 1960, at age 17, Ada arrived in the U.S. as a political refugee. Soon she joined the Ursuline sisters and, in 1967, was sent to Lima, Peru, as a missionary.

“I lived there for three years,” Ada wrote. “This experience marked me for life ... It was there that the poor taught me the gospel message of justice. It was there that I learned to respect and admire the religious understandings and practices of the poor and the oppressed and the importance of their everyday struggles, of *lo cotidiano*.”

Her research on *lo cotidiano*—the dynamic daily lives of Latino/as—argued that theology didn’t have

CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

A new, more civil conversation is emerging with gays and lesbians on evangelical campuses.

DURING STEVE SLAGG'S freshman year at Wheaton College in Illinois, a gay-rights advocacy group called Soulforce announced that it was embarking on a nationwide bus tour of conservative Christian colleges that had campus policies against homosexuality to facilitate some of the first open conversations about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Wheaton College was one of their stops.

"We were talking a lot on campus about Soulforce and what we were going to do about them," remembers Slagg about the spring 2006 tour. "It felt like nobody was really aware of the fact that there were people in this community who were gay."

So Slagg decided to come out. He started with friends and classmates, but he also spoke with campus groups, and he held a meeting on his dormitory floor. He was interviewed in the campus paper, *The Record*, under the headline "Gay at Wheaton," and numerous classmates approached him for private coffeehouse conversations around campus.

The pressure and attention grew to be too much, and Slagg quickly receded into normal campus life.

But during Slagg's senior year, after feeling as though the conversations around homosexuality on campus had not changed, he wrote an essay for a new campus literary journal, *The Pub*, about being gay at Wheaton. "We exist," he declared. "The most harmful and pervasive lie I've encountered at Wheaton has been that homosexual

students either don't exist at Wheaton or aren't worth considering. Outrageously enough, I believed this lie for most of my freshman year."

We exist. Today, that is the message gay and lesbian Christian students at conservative evangelical universities are sending to their peers, faculty, and administration—a message that encapsulates in two small words a radical assertion of identity and a challenge to institutions that have long remained silent about the presence of LGBT students on campus. While some schools have quashed opportunities for conversation, others have welcomed them, allowing students to develop their own beliefs about homosexuality, apart from their parents and pastors—but not apart from their faith.

And more and more, these beliefs represent a striking generation gap between students and their elders. For example, while white evangelicals in general constitute the religious group that is the least supportive of allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry (with only 19 percent in favor), younger evangelicals are much more supportive. In a recent small-sample survey by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), for instance, 44 percent of white evangelical millennials (ages 18-29) expressed support for marriage equality, compared to only 12 percent of evangelical seniors (age 65 and older).

Public support for allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry has increased significantly over the last five years, according to PRRI. "Many polling organizations have

reesum to



Steve Slagg at Wheaton College: "It felt like nobody was really aware of the fact that there were people in the community who were gay."



We exist.

That is the message gay and lesbian Christian students at conservative evangelical universities are sending.

recorded double-digit increases in support for same-sex marriage since 2006,” the group reported, and the increase in support among younger people “persists even among conservative political and religious groups.” And nearly seven in 10 millennials, according to the report, agree that religious groups are alienating young people by being too judgmental about gay and lesbian issues.

This new wave of openness among evangelical students and alumni has placed them at the vanguard of the church debate on homosexuality. Young evangelicals no longer automatically agree with established church leaders on what to believe on these issues; instead, through deepened relationships and dialogue (rather than debate), Christian millennials are confronting hard questions about sexuality that the church has long ignored or avoided, and finding the answers for themselves.

THIS WASN'T ALWAYS the case. Just like at Slagg's Wheaton College, conversations about homosexuality on Christian campuses five to 10 years ago were uncommon and often only presented one perspective: that being gay is a choice and a sin, and that gay people require reparative therapy.

Dani Kelley, 26, a recent graduate of Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, remembers a chapel message in which she was taught that anyone who was “sexually immoral” would forever be under reproach, and that the tarnish of

such a sin would never be removed. “It terrified me,” Kelley says. And despite being a straight Christian student, Kelley says she empathized with the discrimination gay and lesbian Christian students must have felt from the school. “I didn't agree with the level of hatred that was shown from the pulpit about homosexuality,” she says.

Kristin Winn, 27, a lesbian alumna of Wheaton College, remembers thriving academically and socially during her years at the school, but says that she was privately suffering under the weight of keeping her sexuality a secret. “I had great friends and loved my classes, and at the same time I felt terrified and very alone,” Winn says. “I didn't know anyone else who was like me, and the options that were presented to me at Wheaton were either remain celibate or change [my orientation].”

The result of these conservative colleges' silence on LGBT issues is that when gay and lesbian students are consistently shamed, ignored, or condemned, the mounting pressures often prove to be too much for them. According to Winn, many LGBT alumni leave their college experiences behind them. “We migrate to big cities and don't want to reengage with that part of ourselves,” she says.

But in September 2010, after a string of tragic suicides by LGBT teenagers inspired the nationwide viral YouTube campaign “It Gets Better”—which sought to encourage gay teens with a promise that life will get better—a group of LGBT Wheaton College alumni began communicating in private Facebook

On his blog, Todd Clayton wrote about growing up in a loving Christian home, and taking tenuous steps toward life as an openly gay man.

Clayton, third adult from left, with his extended family.



groups about their experiences at Wheaton. “I think these suicides moved many of us from the Wheaton community to reflect on where we were at that point in our lives,” Winn says.

In April 2011, these alumni learned that during a weeklong chapel series on sexuality at Wheaton, some invited speakers had condemned homosexuality. The alumni decided to take action. They distributed a letter on campus signed by 100 people assuring current LGBT students that “your sexual identity is not a tragic sign of the sinful nature of the world. You are not tragic. Your desire for companionship, intimacy, and love is not shameful. It is to be affirmed and celebrated just as you are to be affirmed and celebrated.”

Today, the signatories are known as OneWheaton, and they have gathered more than 700 signatures to that first letter. Subsequently, similar alumni groups have cropped up at more than 30 conservative evangelical colleges, according to Catherine Latimer, who serves as a liaison for OneWheaton. “It’s just incredibly exciting, because these groups are getting conversations going on these campuses,” Latimer says. “Being gay on these campuses was such a secret, but now these groups are forming and becoming more public, and they’re being encouraged by one another.”

WITHIN THESE NEW communities, a few voices are emerging as leaders for a

new generation of gay Christians who are committed to reconciling the church and the LGBT community. Some of the most compelling and authoritative writing on homosexuality and the church isn’t being written by established “thought leaders” in the evangelical community, but rather by young unknowns who have an actual stake in the matter. One example is Todd Clayton, 23, who came out in 2011 during his senior year at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. As he was the student chaplain at Point Loma, and the son of two Nazarene pastors, Clayton’s coming out caused a furor in the Nazarene community. After several months of bearing the brunt of denominational gossip, Clayton decided to tell his story in his own words by writing on his personal blog and for online publications (including Sojourners’ God’s Politics blog).

In his blog posts, Clayton shared with remarkable candor about growing up in a loving Christian home, realizing his sexuality, and taking tenuous steps toward life as an openly gay man. He wrote about first dates, awkward conversations with his parents about sex, his struggle with depression, and the ups and downs of his faith journey.

His writing is beautiful and moving, primarily because he writes about homosexuality not as an issue, but as a part of his personal narrative—one that many gay Christians say they read and relate to.

When asked why he writes, Clayton uses language that’s familiar to evangelical Christians. “I don’t know where this comes from, but it’s like a deep, passionate, fierce desire in my person,” Clayton says. “I want to save the gays *and* the evangelical church. I want gay people to know they’re not crazy, but that there’s health and a future possible for them. They don’t have to be people marked by fear or pain, and that’s why I’m writing.”

And for the many readers who email Clayton, it’s working. “I’ve literally had thousands of emails from around the world,” Clayton says. “The craziest one was from a person who was 80 years old. He said, ‘I’ve never experienced full love. Thank you for making this a possibility for other people who are your age.’”

Matthew Vines, a 22-year-old living in Wichita, Kansas, is also making waves in the blogosphere in his attempt to address the dearth of theological and biblical study on homosexuality in evangelical circles. After coming out his freshman year at Harvard, Vines decided to take two years



"I'm pretty sure God doesn't hate people. I'm pretty sure that God loves them, particularly because love is the greatest and second-greatest commandment."

**—Dani Kelley,
Hagerstown, Maryland**



"I wanted to engage with Christians in a meaningful discussion about Christianity." —Matthew Vines, with his parents

off school to devote his life to studying what the Bible says about homosexuality. Raised in a conservative Christian home, Vines grew up with a vibrant relationship with Christ that continues to this day. "I love Jesus," he says. "Christianity is clearly the anchor of truth in the world and so there's no way I can give up on it. It's what my entire worldview is centered around, and I can't change it even if I wanted to."

After coming out, Vines struggled with his church's teachings condemning homosexuality, but felt he didn't know enough to

to be able to engage and dialogue with Christians in a meaningful discussion about Christianity. I wanted to be able to feel that my position was correct, and I wanted to be able to argue for it persuasively," Vines says.

PERHAPS MOST EMBLEMATIC of the sea change happening among young evangelicals is the involvement of straight allies, the majority of whom have been raised in conservative homes.

Clinton Verley, a 2010 graduate of Bob Jones University, was raised in a conservative

what the Bible says about homosexuality, he says. Like most evangelicals, Verley believes there must be a biblical answer, but through his relationship with Jonathan, Verley came to believe that God does not condemn the LGBT community the way much of the church has. "I believe God creates people either straight or gay. I believe God makes people that way. I think that's indisputable," Verley says. He says he still doesn't completely understand Bible passages that seem to condemn homosexuality, but he is committed to studying the biblical teaching on the subject. "It's a work in progress," he says. "I'm still reading a lot of things about how homosexuality relates to the Bible, but I accept gay people, and their rights are very important to me."

Dani Kelley's friendships with gay and lesbian people made her feel conflicted. "I grew up Plymouth Brethren, and the Bible is drilled into you from the time you are a small child," she says. Raised in an extremely conservative home, Kelley grew up memorizing scripture, avoiding secular music, and being restricted from watching certain movies. She went to church three times a week, and her father worked in ministry. And while she doesn't adhere to the same strict guidelines, she remains committed to the Bible and has difficulty reconciling some of the Bible's statements on homosexuality. The question for her, as for many Bible-centered Christians, is whether the texts in question have anything to do with modern same-sex relationships.

Christian millennials are confronting hard questions about sexuality that the church has long ignored or avoided.

understand the scriptures and the teachings of the church. "I was surprised to learn how many people on both sides of the debate within the church haven't done serious study about the issue," says Vines. "Their arguments tend to be pretty surface level, and people tend to be recycling all the things they are saying."

Vines studied more than 50 books on homosexuality, read numerous journal articles, and even learned Greek in order to study the original biblical texts. Today, he continues to write about what he has learned, and he has delivered lectures at churches to share his discoveries. Motivating his scholarship is a desire to engage Christians in an open and informed conversation. "I wanted

church and always believed that homosexuality was a sin—until he befriended a gay alumnus named Jonathan through a private Facebook community of gay and straight Bob Jones alumni.

"I had never actually met an openly gay person," Verley says. Jonathan and Verley's online exchange proved to be life-changing for Verley. "At school, being gay was seen as so disgusting, so immoral, and so unnatural that you couldn't imagine a real person being that way," Verley says. "But meeting Jonathan was like putting a human face to a dehumanized [label]. You meet someone and you realize they're just like you."

Verley's growing friendship with Jonathan challenged his previous beliefs on

"I believe God creates people either straight or gay. I think that's indisputable."

—Clinton Verley, with his wife, Megan, Lake Orion, Michigan



"We're willing to talk to each other and we can create space for a less hysterical understanding of homosexuality in the public square."

—Matthew Lee Anderson, St. Louis

"I have a hard time with the 'lobber passages," Kelley says. "But I'm willing to step back and say, I don't know what God is saying here, but I'm pretty sure he doesn't hate people. I'm pretty sure that he loves them, particularly because love is the greatest and second-greatest commandment—loving the Lord and loving everyone else." With these

the governmental view of marriage, although many evangelicals and others are convinced that this is the best way forward on the issue.

"I've faced opposition from younger evangelicals who really want to view this distinction between the religious conception and the governmental conception of marriage as a solution to the culture wars, but I'm skeptical,"

"Christ said that what you do to the least of these, you do to me, and I take that very seriously."

—Mike McGeehon, an alumni of George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon

convictions, both Verley and Kelley are involved with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Alumni of Bob Jones University, acting as straight advocates for their fellow alumni. "I want to help create a safe place for dialogue," says Kelley. "And I think part of loving my neighbor is identifying with them."

Still, it seems that for the majority of millennial evangelical Christians, loving one's gay neighbor doesn't necessarily mean an immediate endorsement of marriage equality or explicit support for LGBT rights. Matthew Lee Anderson, 30, is a Christian writer in St. Louis, Missouri, who identifies as a millennial evangelical with a more broadly conservative view on public marriage. Anderson believes that evangelicals in support of same-sex civil marriage are naive about the negative ramifications of trying to separate the religious view of marriage from

Anderson says. "I think if you look at what's going on with the Catholic Charities shutting down [their adoption services in several cities] because of anti-discrimination laws, that strikes me as a very tangible point of genuine conflict between the religious and governmental conception of marriage."

Anderson does believe, however, that the conversation between conservative evangelicals and the LGBT community is shifting toward a more civil dialogue of mutual friendship and open communication. While he is careful to emphasize that a "let's get along" approach could lead young evangelicals toward what he considers a too-loose policy position on same-sex marriage, Anderson appreciates the new generation's emphasis on friendship as a civic virtue. "We're willing to talk to each other, and we can create space for a less hysterical understanding of homosexuality in the public square," Anderson says.

"That's not a policy solution, but I would say most younger evangelicals want to root their public engagement on this question with that relational approach."

Regardless of where one falls on the question of marriage equality, loving God and loving neighbor proves to be the clarion call for many evangelical Christians conflicted about how to love their LGBT friends and family members. Mike McGeehon, an alumnus of George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, found great comfort in knowing that his call as a Christian was to love, not condemn, his gay peers. As an active member of One George Fox, McGeehon remains grounded in his faith in Christ. "I actually sat down and read the gospels to see the example of Christ," McGeehon says. "Jesus Christ is hanging out with the 'wrong' people in his time. He is giving grace to tax collectors; he is hanging out with the prostitutes; he is healing the centurion's servant. I think that's our example."

When asked if he felt called to be an advocate for gay Christians in the church, McGeehon paused, but only briefly.

"Yes," he replies. "Christ said that what you do to the least of these, you do to me, and I take that very seriously. We're supposed to show love and grace ... and in mainstream Christianity, I think that includes our gay neighbors." ■

Jeannie Choi is a freelance writer and editor in Washington, D.C., and former web editor at Sojourners.

RETELLING THE STORY

Chicago's North Park offers a model for honest conversation • by TIM KING

NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY might be the only evangelical college in the country with a school-sanctioned student group that includes the word “queer” in its name. Like many other evangelical schools, North Park has had unofficial clubs or informal meetings of students to talk about issues of sexuality, but two years ago a proposal was accepted by the student senate to make “Queers and Allies,” or Q&A, an official student club. The core leadership team is small, but events often attract between 35 and 75 students to hear various perspectives and discuss topics ranging from interpretations of scripture to “queer history” and understandings of gay identity.

There has been no public opposition to the club's existence, says Rick Sindt, one of the group's student founders and leaders. “The overall atmosphere is ambiguous,” Sindt says. “There are institutional policies in place that hinder faculty from being out or even vocal.” But still, he says, encouragement both on campus and from alumni has been “abundant.”

North Park upholds the teachings of its sponsoring denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church, which prohibits the ordination of openly gay clergy and does not allow for its pastors to perform same-sex weddings, unions, or blessings. Still, Sindt, who is gay, is actively involved in campus ministries and the spiritual life of the college. He recently gave his testimony at a chapel service and traveled to India for a service and mission trip. While it has been hard for him to find a church home, he remains dedicated to his faith.

Students involved in Q&A regularly wrestle with scripture, a practice central to basic evangelical com-

“I cannot walk around this campus and ignore the hate that is inexplicably directed toward humans created in the image of God.”

mitment. Instead of dismissing the Bible or reducing their views of its teaching, some argue that it is exactly because they take the Bible seriously that they are supportive of other LGBT students. “For me, it comes down to what I've found in the gospel,” says Abi Svoboda, another student who identifies as straight and is involved with Q&A as an ally. “I cannot walk around this world, or this campus, and ignore the hate that is inexplicably directed toward others—toward humans created in the image of God.”

Also important is the power of story. Andrew



Q&A photo

Freeman, an openly gay man who graduated from North Park in 2005, started “Coming Out Covenant,” a blog dedicated to telling the stories of LGBT Christians, their friends, and families. The site involves some North Park students and alums but also brings the conversation to the broader denomination. “Our entire faith revolves around the telling and retelling of the story of God's action in the world in and through Christ,” says Freeman. “As soon as you start telling stories, this ceases to be merely an abstract issue and becomes about real people who

are often closer to us than we had realized. These are our neighbors, friends, classmates, relatives.”

While North Park as an institution remains traditional in its stance on sexuality, the space that it allows for students to talk about the issue is unique. For a generation that values dialogue and relationships, North Park's commitment to providing space for honest conversation might be a model for other evangelical schools to follow. ■

Tim King is chief communications officer at Sojourners.

BY ISAAC S. VILLEGAS AND
JONATHAN WILSON-HARTGROVE

STABILITY vs. MOBILITY

**Should we stay or should we go?
Being rooted in one place is a good thing,
but faithfulness doesn't end
where the road begins.**

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Isaac S. Villegas are friends and fellow kingdom-bringers in Durham, North Carolina. Since publishing *The Wisdom of Stability* in 2010, Jonathan has been calling Christians to put down roots and pay attention to place for the sake of God's reign. Isaac has gently challenged him to recognize the dangers of stability and the way immigrants or marginalized members of a community are often excluded by those who "own their place." They offer their conversation as an invitation to discern with them a theology of place for our time.

Getty Images



Isaac S. Villegas: I

was working alongside a little girl in our congregation's community garden at the women's shelter in Chapel Hill. As we were digging, she looked up at me and said that her mom warned her to beware of lice when playing out-

side. I reassured her that I hadn't seen any lice around, but I asked her if she knew what to look out for. "Yes," she said. "My mom told me to watch out for Mexicans because they bring lice." I looked down at my hands, wondering if my hue revealed that I'm from lands further south than Mexico. Will this child grow up to think that people like me don't belong in the South, that we are social contaminants, that our cultures dirty the body politic, that we spread lice?

These are the questions that linger in my mind when I hear my friend Jonathan argue for a recovery of "the wisdom of stability" in the Christian community. In this land where both Jonathan and I live, I'm uneasy when I hear "stability" because I see how such rhetoric belongs to a particular Southern tradition. I am the foreigner, of questionable lineage, that the people who've been here longer can reject or accept—reject because they think that I'm a threat to the stability of the community, or accept because they think I will contribute to a sustainable future. In either case, the assumption is that they are the ones entrusted with the land and culture. Arguments about stability have fueled people's claims to own or steward the land and their assumption that they are the gatekeepers of society, deciding who belongs where.

"I hope to reprogram your default setting," Jonathan writes in his book. "Our default is to move." Instead of movement, he points to the witness of trees, which serves as the book's focal image: "Trees can be transplanted ... But their default is to stay." I worry that to celebrate stability as the solution to movement renders recent immigrants as defective Christians—wild, unruly, in need of reprogramming.

Movement is my default setting: It's in my immigrant blood; it's the story of my family. While the wisdom of stability privileges the parts of the Bible that call us to



"Faithfulness involves resisting the seductions of worldly power wherever we are, and such resistance may involve relocation."

—Isaac S. Villegas

permanency, I find good news in the biblical stories of wandering, exodus, relocation, and mission. These stories resonate with the lives of migrants—people who are not trees, but birds: always building and abandoning nests as they follow the seasons.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove: Every writer needs friends who remind them that words can be dangerous. I'm grateful for Isaac, who keeps me thinking hard about what I'm saying and why.

Shortly after *The Wisdom of Stability* was published, I got a call from the director of a mission agency who'd read the book. He asked if I'd come and speak to the global gathering of the group's staff. I'd love to, I told him, but wondered why they thought a word on stability was needed. "Well, we have a problem in missions," he said. "We keep sending people who've never belonged anywhere. They don't seem to have much capacity to connect with the places where we send them."

In a hypermobile culture that has maxed out our technological ability without much attention to the long-term social and ecological consequences, I'm convinced that we're in desperate need of some Psalm 1 witnesses: people of faith who are like trees, planted by the waters, putting down roots in particular places, and building communities that advocate for the common good. On the other side of peak oil, *everyone* is going to be desperate for wisdom about how to stay well. The good news is that we have a treasure trove of wisdom in the literature of monastics, who've made vows of stability for more than 1,500 years.

But as I've continued to advocate for a recovery of the wisdom of stability, I've emphasized more and more that I don't think Christians should stay *instead* of go. Rather, I think we need to learn how to stay so that

we can go well. The stability that's at the heart of scripture and the Christian tradition isn't opposed to mission. It is an integral part of it.

In the course of some people's lifetimes (I often use my granny as an example), we've moved from living in communities that are walkable to living in a so-called "global village." Humans have demonstrated our capacity to cover great distances. But we have forgotten the wisdom that teaches us when to go and when to stay.

Still, there's more to the story. Isaac has helped me see a consequence of hypermobility that many of us have ignored for a long time. Because technology is always connected to power, privileged people have often displaced vulnerable people. Native Americans thus became involuntary immigrants, African Americans were forced to endure the Middle Passage as slaves, and others became economic migrants in a global market where access was not evenly distributed. It would, as Isaac suggests, be incredibly unjust to consider any of this mobility "unfaithful." Instead, these migrants are the very people who may be able to help us learn what faithfulness means.

So as Christians try to discern a faithful and just way of life in a hypermobile culture, how does the immigrant experience teach us to understand our basic human need for place, for land, for a home? Isaac is right. We have to learn from the birds. But the wisdom of stability suggests that they, too, know something about the need to stay put. "If a bird abandons the egg she has been sitting on," the desert mother Syncletica said, "she prevents them from hatching, and in the same way ... our faith will perish if we go around from one place to another."

Villegas: I love Amma Syncletica's story about the mother bird. Jonathan tells this story at the end of his book as he shifts our attention to Mary, the mother of Jesus: "Mary demonstrates a fragile stability," he writes, "trusting God's interruption and making her nest in a borrowed manger." That's a wonderful way to picture the Christian life. We are like birds, making nests for life to grow; we are like Mary, borrowing a corner of the world in order to make room for the gospel to be born.

Yet, the story of Mary was a story of migration, of moving from place to place, of

doing everything she could in order to keep her baby alive—a pregnant woman forced to move from her hometown, giving birth in a village of strangers, and fleeing in the middle of the night to protect her child from Herod's sinister plans.

And, yes, Syncletica told her people to build nests, but she was also part of a fourth century movement of migration from all that was comfortable and familiar. She pulled up her roots in the city of Alexandria, left behind the wealth and power of her family, and chose to live in a tomb. Her community had become toxic for faith, so she moved into the desert to form a new kind of Christianity where life in Christ could flourish.

If Syncletica shows us what it looks like to move with the Spirit, then we should always be ready to abandon our homes and relocate. For people who are living in the mission of God, there is no default setting for our lives when it comes to questions of geographic mobility or stability. Instead, faithfulness involves resisting the seductions of worldly power wherever we are, and such resistance may involve relocation, as it did for Syncletica. The same stories from which Jonathan discerns a call to stay can also give us the courage to move. There is wisdom in both ways of life.

The issue of mobility or stability is not what I find most central in the story of Syncletica. I am, instead, convicted by her decision to live in a tomb, to live in a place that has been given over to the powers of death. Perhaps that's what the Christian life should look like in our time and place: to let the Holy Spirit draw us into tombs, into the places where the forces of death seem to have dominion. As we dwell in these sites of desolation, we learn to hope and pray that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead would move in our midst, that we would bear witness to the power of resurrection. Like Syncletica, we can turn tombs into nests that welcome Christ's resurrection: nests, built for a season, as way stations for refugees and pilgrims who are being set free from the bondage of evil, from the chains of injustice.

Wilson-Hartgrove: Nearly a decade ago, when we invited new monastic communities from around the country to talk about patterns of life that we share in common,



“Only by staying to face our fears are we born again to a new imagination.”

—Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

our gathering named “relocation to the abandoned places of Empire” as a mark we all valued. As Isaac says, people who live by the power of resurrection find their home in places of death and decay. Neglected inner cities and abandoned farmlands have been the fertile ground for our movement. It's no accident that Isaac and I work together here in North Carolina on Project TURN, a prison-based education program that invites people inside the walls and behind the bars to imagine with incarcerated friends what a new world can look like, right here in the shell of the old.

But as I work with people who are confronting America's system of mass incarceration, I find that they wrestle the same demons that the desert mothers and fathers did. Something deep in our gut says, “You don't have to stay here. Get out while you can.” Yes, the Spirit drove Jesus and the early monastics into the desert to pray. They did, indeed, relocate. But the Spirit also gave them grace to stay put. Only by staying to face our fears are we born again to a new imagination.

I think this is why stability became a central vow of the monastic tradition. Generation after generation, communities of radical discipleship have witnessed the power of fear to overcome us as we face the systems of death. Yes, we have seen that love is stronger than death—that resurrection is possible in the abandoned places where we are. But we need practices to help us remember this. Stability, I think, is one of them.

But it's equally important to note how even the monastic wisdom warns against the dangers of stability. In the early days of the desert communities, vainglory and pride were identified as “bad thoughts” that could infect the mind of someone as she stood her ground in the struggle against the demons. In the Benedictine tradition, this pride of place led, in some cases, to the amassing of wealth and power and the corruption of whole communities. Reformers who made promises of stabil-

ity wrestled with the question of how to live faithfully in light of these dangers. Their discernment returns again and again to two central practices of *The Rule of Benedict*: hospitality and humility.

If we're going to build nests where God's kingdom of justice and peace is welcomed into the abandoned places of our world, hospitality must be central. At the heart of this practice is the biblical reminder that we were once aliens and strangers ourselves. What's more, our Lord comes to us in the guise of the stranger, so Benedict reminds us to “greet every guest as Christ.” That's not “be nice to every outsider”—a patronizing sort of hospitality—but “remember that every new person who comes along may be the gift that saves you.”

This kind of hospitality is inextricably connected to Benedict's notion of humility, which is the ultimate goal of both the *Rule* and the gospel life. Monastic wisdom insists that we make promises, work hard, and devote ourselves to prayer for one reason and one reason only: to become like Christ. True stability, then, can never be a means to prop up ourselves or our group. It's always for the sake of the world. ■

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship and a co-author of Presence: Giving and Receiving God (Cascade, 2011). Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is author of The Wisdom of Stability and a new paraphrase of The Rule of Saint Benedict (Paraclete Press).



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BEAUTY AND LIBERATION

A tribute to artist Elizabeth Catlett

WHENEVER I ENTERED a museum gallery and saw sculptures by Elizabeth Catlett, I wanted to touch them. The figures were often smooth, glistening, and engaging. They spoke to me in the same manner as the poetry of Langston Hughes and the musical compositions of Duke Ellington.

When Catlett died in April, I was reminded again that she created artwork for celebration and spiritual nourishment. She mastered the ability to bring beauty out of wood and stone.

In many ways Catlett was ahead of her times. During the 1940s she had explored the black woman's body as a theme for sculpture and paintings. The images she created upheld the strength and dignity of women. The black woman presented as mother could be seen nurturing a child. In work such as "Homage to My Young Black Sisters," the black woman figure strikes a posture of resistance with a fist raised. The buttocks of the cedar sculpture reflect strength as well as sensuality. One is quickly reminded of young Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee workers, members of the Black Panther Party, and even activist Angela Davis. "Homage to My Young Black Sisters" was created in 1968, the same year the Summer Olympics in Mexico City saw track stars John Carlos and Tommie Smith raise their fists on the awards stand in a black power salute.

The art of Elizabeth Catlett ignored borders. Although she resided in Mexico, her work reflected the changing consciousness of African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights and black power movements renewed interest in African-American history. The black art movement introduced a desire to define a black aesthetic. Catlett's work as an elder provided younger artists with a model and a teacher to emulate. In 1969, she created the print "Malcolm X

Speaks for Us." In it we see how she links Malcolm's face to that of other black faces. The result is a powerful sense of community.

ELIZABETH CATLETT WAS born in Washington, D.C., in 1915 and graduated with honors from Howard University in 1935. Her early life was one that was affected by issues of race. After completing high school, she was prevented from enrolling at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh because she was African American. Several years later she would complete her graduate work at the University of Iowa, studying under important American artists, such as Grant Wood. During the 1940s she was politically active, demonstrating against segregation and for human rights. In 1941 she married Charles White, a fellow artist from Chicago. After White was awarded a Rosenwald Fellowship, the couple traveled throughout the South gathering material for a mural project for Hampton Institute. This experience made Catlett more aware of her racial roots. She would eventually teach at Dillard University in Louisiana and Prairie View College in Texas.

Elizabeth Catlett was committed to making large public works—art that would have special meaning to black people, making them aware of their human potential. I was introduced to Catlett's art in the 1970s, and I came to associate her with Mexico. She made her first trip there in 1946 with Charles White. She would come in contact with many of the famous Mexican muralists, and her work would be influenced by her adopted country as much as by the black experience.

After her divorce from White, she married the Mexican artist Francisco Mora. They lived in Mexico City. Here Catlett was

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Artist Elizabeth Catlett.
At left, Catlett's
"Sharecropper" (1952).

New & Noteworthy

GOD AND THE GODFORSAKEN

Rafael Luévano, a Catholic priest and professor, writes a moving narrative theology of suffering—based on extensive field research—in *Woman-Killing in Juárez: Theodicy at the Border*. A powerful blend of reporting, analysis, and poetic theological meditation. Orbis



SEARCHING HARMONIES

Veteran songwriter, producer, and musician Phil Madeira pulls together an all-star lineup including The Civil Wars, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, Mat Kearney, and Emmylou Harris for the alt-roots album *Mercyland: Hymns for the Rest of Us*—nondoctrinal music that yearns for a God who is love. Mercyland Records

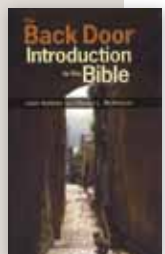
IN SHADOWS AND HOPE

In the 40-day devotional *Not Alone: Reflections on Faith and Depression*, Monica A. Coleman, an ordained A.M.E. elder and Claremont School of Theology professor, deftly blends theological thought, medical research, and personal experience in honest spiritual reflections for those suffering depressive disorders and those who accompany them. Inner Prizes Inc.



BIBLE CULTURE 101

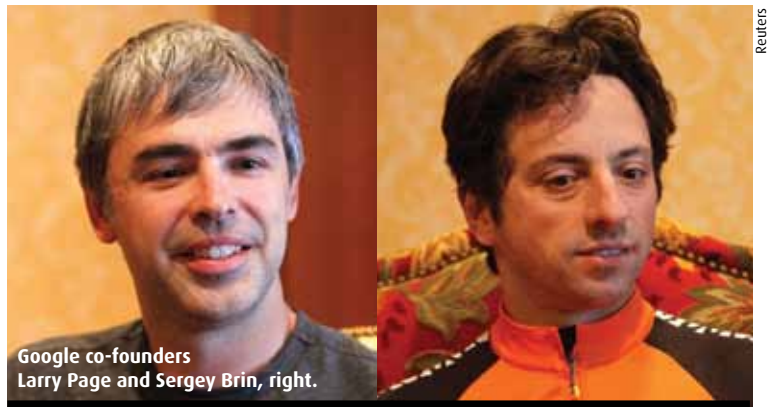
While suitable for classrooms, *The Back Door Introduction to the Bible*, by John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie, is also lively reading for anyone who'd like to enhance their understanding of biblical texts by learning more about the symbolism, customs, and social mores found there. Anselm Academic



Evil Is as Evil Does

FOR MORE THAN a decade Google Inc. operated with a simple unofficial motto, “Don’t be evil.” And for a long time, the search-engine giant really seemed to be a company driven mainly by the desire to provide a truly excellent service in a manner that put the needs of the user first. Well, that slogan may have been good for a super-geek startup, but it doesn’t seem to work so well for the publicly held global empire Google has become.

Here are a few recent examples of Google behavior that is somewhat less than “not evil.” In March of this year, the company launched a new “privacy” policy that basically consists of warning you that you’re not going to have any. In April, the company was fined by the FCC for privacy violations committed by its infamous “Street View” cars. Apparently, in addition to collecting photographs of random sites on Google Earth, those cars have also been collecting data from unsecured



Google co-founders
Larry Page and Sergey Brin, right.

to reach, and Google seized it.

But Microsoft is history now. These days its founder, Bill Gates, seems mostly interested in trying to buy back his soul with good works. And his successors persist in flogging progressively worse and worse versions of its old operating system and its trademark applications, which are mostly clones of products invented by other companies.

The high-tech business is a lot more sophisticated today. Back when

we have on scraps of paper and business cards, copying our shopping lists, and maybe scanning all those pictures of our kids. The money is still there when the wallet is returned, so we never know the difference, but Google now has everything it needs to sell us out to advertisers who will, someday soon, seize our brains and project personalized ads onto the back of our eyelids. That’s the Google way.

But then Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg came along. He’s another Harvard bad boy in the Gatesian mold, willing to do with brazen aggression what Google was already doing with a veneer of bohemian gentility. One doesn’t imagine the question of evil gets discussed much at Facebook headquarters. So to keep shoveling in those mountains of advertiser cash, Google had to take the gloves off. Apparently, Google has a new unofficial motto. Executive chair Eric Schmidt articulated it to *The Atlantic* magazine a year and a half ago when he said, “Google policy is to get right up to the creepy line and not cross it.” In other words, don’t

be so evil that you drive away customers. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. His latest book is the novel *White Boy*.



Microsoft was an extortionist, but Google is a pickpocket.

home Wi-Fi networks. Google has also been charged with anti-trust violations for entering an agreement with Apple, Intel, Adobe, Intuit, Pixar, and Lucasfilm to never recruit each other’s employees.

The “don’t be evil” line worked well for Google back in the late 1990s when it could compare itself to Microsoft. That company, in its heyday, was an unabashed incarnation of evil in the best old robber-baron style. It routinely did things like programming your computer to sabotage its competitors’ software. Meanwhile, Google’s main competitor in the search business, Yahoo, was making headlines for turning over dissidents’ web activity to the Chinese government. In those days the ethical high ground wasn’t hard

Microsoft held a gun to your head and made you pay, Google ascended by seeming to give stuff away. It used to take a half-hour of tortoise time for Microsoft’s ad-laden MSN page to load, but Google always popped up clean and white, ad-free, and quick as a bunny. And it delivered miraculous results.

It took us ordinary civilians a while to figure out how Google was making its money. But now we all know. Microsoft was an extortionist, but Google is a pickpocket. While it has us dazzled with those personalized search results and pictures of the roof of our house, it is quietly going through our wallet, writing down all those passwords and phone numbers

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inspired by how activists used art to make political statements. In 1958, she became the first female sculpture professor at Mexico's National School of Fine Arts, a position she held until her retirement in 1976.

Elizabeth Catlett often spoke of how her art had to be something people needed. I think this desire was reflective of her progressive politics. One comes away from the work of Catlett with a sense of being liberated.

Her 1952 print "Sharecropper" is an amazing tribute to rural workers. Catlett presents a woman whose face and hat are nothing but extensions of her surroundings. Poverty

One comes away from the work of Catlett with a sense of being liberated.

is conveyed by a simple safety pin holding a garment together. The woman's nose, cheekbones, and neck are directly connected to the earth by color and muscular tones.

This is what hard work does to flesh. Catlett presents an image that has been chiseled by time. The woman's eyes seem to be staring not just off into the distance but



"Homage to My Young Black Sisters" (1968)

perhaps at other workers in the field. Catlett produced this print at the Taller de Grafica Popular to represent the Mexican people. Yet in many ways this woman looks as if she is working in Mississippi or Louisiana. The female sharecropper is presented as a woman of the earth, and this connects her to people everywhere.

Catlett's recent death made me think of other African-American women visual artists who became image pioneers, women who in their own field and discipline were as heroic and courageous as



From *Samsara*

SCREENING RELEVANCE

THE TRUTHS FLICKERED into visible expression at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, are, minute-for-minute, usually among the cinematic highlights of the year.

The line between documentary and fiction movies has blurred: On the one hand, even a Hollywood package as huge as *The Dark Knight* has its share of verite-style intimate handheld camerawork (and thoughtful politics—Batman is presented as nothing less than the necessary sacrifice for a community that has to kill someone to stay "pure"). On the other, the top 10 grossing documentaries of all time were each released in the past decade: Audiences are attracted by the fusion of social engagement and entertainment like never before.

Michael Moore's appearance at the festival reminded me how common it is for activists to want to make films just because it's cool (which usually makes for bad films), or for filmmakers to inject a dose of socially "relevant" messaging into their movie because they think it will increase the box office. (Think of when churches jumped on the bandwagon for Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Mel got rich. Jesus, I aver, stayed 99 percent poor.) Moore's point is that you should make documentaries because you want to make films—you can be an activist without being a filmmaker.

But if you've got the heart and the talent, it should rise to the surface, and if it does, you'll usually end up at Full Frame, where this year's highlights were three films that mingle mature cinematic craft with ethical depth.

Under African Skies relates Paul Simon's controversial recording of the 1986 album *Graceland* in a South Africa whose anti-apartheid movement was supporting a cultural boycott. Simon emerges a humble man, willing to correct himself, to hear feedback, and to balance ideological purity with the assertion that artists must be beholden to no political party.

Mr. Cao Goes to Washington demands attention from those who hope for bipartisan politics in the U.S.: Mr. Anh "Joseph" Cao is an immigrant, an open-minded Catholic, a Republican representing a majority Democrat district, and the first Vietnamese-American member of Congress. The paradox of Cao's desire to serve people, while allied to issues of conscience with which his constituents may disagree, is the heart of this vignette of hopeful lament about the current political system.

Above all these stood the magisterial **Samsara**, a film about everything on earth, it seems, photographed to appear as if the audience were aliens seeing the planet and her people for the first time. It's the 2001: *A Space Odyssey* of documentaries—it tells the truth about our interdependence, offers heartbreaking beauty, and is as stirring as an epic Western, as moving as a tragic romance, and as thrilling as the feeling I had the last time we scapegoated Batman for our sins. ■

Gareth Higgins is a Sojourners contributing editor and executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. Originally from Northern Ireland, he lives in Durham, North Carolina.

Harriett Tubman and Rosa Parks. The names Lois Mailou Jones and Alma Thomas come to mind. What obstacles did these women have to overcome? What sacrifices did they have to make? What do we learn from their lives?

Catlett eventually gave up her American citizenship. She was even declared an “undesirable alien” by the State Department. According to her *New York Times* obituary, Catlett had to obtain a special visa in 1971 to

attend the opening of her one-woman show at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Let us place this woman’s name next to W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Martin Luther King Jr. May future generations look at her images and be renewed. ■

E. Ethelbert Miller is editor of Poet Lore magazine, director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University, and author, most recently, of The Fifth Inning.

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

THE PARTY OF AYN RAND’S DISCONTENT

The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism, by Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson. Oxford University Press.
Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America’s Soul, by Gary Weiss. St. Martin’s Press.

SEEMINGLY OUT of nowhere, the newly founded conservative tea party delivered a stunning blow to Democrats in the November 2010 election, causing them to lose control of the U.S. House of Representatives. Just two years earlier, the 2008 election had severely weakened Republican forces with the election of the country’s first African-American president, Barack Obama, who won by promising change after eight years of the Bush administration.

Two recently published, fascinating books, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, by Harvard social policy experts Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, and *Ayn Rand Nation*, by award-winning financial journalist Gary Weiss, provide a treasure trove of careful research, new material, and balanced reporting that throws much-needed light on how the tea party was born and how it became a lightning rod for many frustrated Americans.

Who are the tea party members? They are, for the most part, middle-class white people over the age of 45, as the general media have already reported. But as one tea partier told the Harvard researchers, “We

are not a bunch of uneducated, racist red-necks.” Her view is, in part, corroborated in the book. Skocpol and Williamson found through hundreds of interviews that the movement is indeed made up of many college-educated people (some graduates, some not) who live throughout the U.S. They are engineers, IT managers, small business-people, home contractors, and teachers. Although as a group they lost jobs, businesses, and retirement money in the recent

recession, they were not hit nearly as hard, report the Harvard researchers, as those with lower incomes.

What brought out tea party rage? One source was an unlikely populist crusader, CNBC financial broadcaster Rick Santelli, who suddenly began ranting on the air on Feb. 19, 2009, that “the government is rewarding bad behavior” by subsidizing those about to lose their homes through

President Obama’s home foreclosure relief plan. His rant was picked up by the Drudge Report and then rebroadcast through the major media.

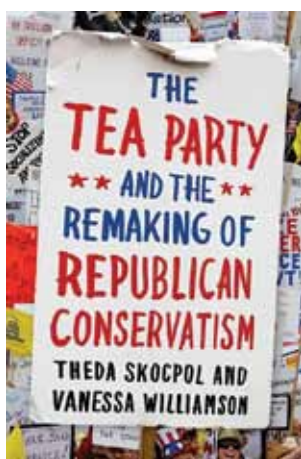
Santelli hit a nerve among the public, and the effect was electric. Discussions and organizing followed around the country

and over the internet. People were deeply concerned about the country’s debt, illegal immigrants they saw as “sopping up” a broad variety of federal and state entitlements, big banks propped up despite profligate risk-taking, and eventually the Affordable Care Act of 2010—all stoked the ire of what eventually came to be tens of thousands of tea party voters irate at financially supporting those they felt “didn’t earn it.” (*New York Times* economic columnist David Leonhardt characterized the Obama health-care plan as “one of the most redistributive and equality-promoting major pieces of legislation in decades,” according to Weiss.)

A potent influence on the tea party movement has been the renewed popularity of Russian-born author Ayn Rand, who died in 1982. Rand has been called the godmother of the tea party because of her blockbuster 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged*. The 55-year-old novel has re-emerged near the top of the country’s bestseller lists over the last few years. Paul Ryan, chair of the powerful House Budget Committee, recently commented, “the reason I got involved in public service, by and large ... would be Ayn Rand.” Ryan’s signature plan has been to abolish Medicare as we know it and replace it with a totally market-driven insurance program, erasing the government’s role.

“What’s indisputable,” writes Weiss, “is that Ayn Rand was a novelist, playwright, essayist, and screenwriter. All those roles were secondary to her objective in life, which was to advance the cause of the most radical form of free-market, laissez-faire capitalism.” Yet Rand accepted Social Security benefits and relied heavily on Medicare for many years. Her extremely ill, dementia-ridden husband, Frank O’Connor, could not have existed without it, Weiss notes.

Weiss also discovers that a lot of avid *Atlas Shrugged* devotees in the tea party, in fact, know little about Ayn Rand and her personal history. Born Alissa Rosenbaum in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1905, Rand witnessed the Bolshevik revolution firsthand. Her father’s pharmacy, along with factories, offices, and other shops, was raided and shut down by the Bolsheviks. Seeing her father frightened and terrorized left a deep mark on the 12-year-old



future emigré to the U.S. American literary critics would later bristle against Rand's all-out attacks on any government intervention—particularly the New Deal programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which Rand loudly claimed would turn into a totalitarian dictatorship, similar to those in Germany and Russia. As Weiss sums up, “It seemed that everything she

said about government was aimed not at the reality of America, but the Russia that she left in 1926 ... the totalitarian, half-starved, brutal Russia she knew.” The tea partiers, most likely, would disagree. ■

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at Business Week and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.

Interview by Brittany Shoot

HIKING THROUGH **HEARTBREAK**

Author and advice columnist Cheryl Strayed on writing and walking her way out of grief.

WRITER Cheryl Strayed's unusually apt last name was self-selected in the wake of her mother's premature death from cancer and after her first marriage collapsed under the weight of grief-stricken infidelity in 1995. Anguished and reeling from loss, then-26-year-old Strayed, a novice hiker, picked a new name for herself and took off on a 1,100-mile solo hike up the Pacific Crest Trail. In three months, she hiked from the Mojave Desert in California to the Washington state line in an attempt to heal. In her new memoir, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (Knopf), she recounts her bold trek into the wilderness and her restorative journey home.

Strayed is also the wildly popular advice columnist for the online culture magazine *The Rumpus* (therumpus.net), writing under the pen name Sugar until she revealed her true identity in February. A collection of her “Dear Sugar” columns, *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Vintage), will be published in July.

Brittany Shoot: Your stint as Sugar on *The Rumpus* has been wildly successful. How do you feel about the fact that many readers take so seriously advice from ordinary people? How does it feel to be treated as a life experiences expert?

Cheryl Strayed: I'm grateful when people tell me my advice has affected them positively,



Author Cheryl Strayed

but I don't translate that into letting myself believe I'm a “life experiences expert.” When I first began writing the “Dear Sugar” column, I thought a lot about whether I was qualified to give advice. Pretty quickly, I came to the conclusion that there really is no such thing as a qualified advice-giver. People who are willing and able to deeply reflect upon a matter and then express those reflections with as little bias and self-interest as possible are almost always going to offer something of value, regardless of their so-called expertise. That person might be your mother. It might be someone you met in the grocery store and chatted with one afternoon. It might be your pastor or therapist or school counselor. It might be an advice columnist who calls herself Sugar. All sorts of people are capable of giving excellent advice, just as all sorts of people—even those who



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Excerpt by Calvin B. DeWitt

WONDROUS CYCLES OF LIFE

JOIN ME IN your imagination for a few minutes in the high Andes. The bamboo that arches over us here—like the tree that arches over your yard or nearby park—is at this very moment taking the carbon you and other creatures are breathing out. It then reforms this carbon into carbohydrate, powered by solar energy and hydrated with water (photosynthesis). It is making sugar from that CO₂. The plant then uses this sugar to provide the energy and materials for making all sorts of new substances.

For example, if I take a leaf from a plant (such as lettuce or kale) and chew and swallow it, it is transformed within me to produce materials for sustaining my life, powering my walking and speaking and writing. And from its use I release carbon dioxide, returning through this gas the very same carbon the leaf had absorbed through the stomatal pores on its surface and incorporated into the leafy food I ingested. To complete the remarkable carbon cycle, the carbon I breathe out is eventually taken up again by green plants that in turn produce food for humans, bugs, birds, and batrachians! (Let's hear a doxology!) Without green plants, all human life perishes—and most other animate life as well.

Plants accomplish a myriad of activities out of our sight. Beneath lawns and gardens, forests and prairies, roots are moving water from the soil, pulling it up through stems into the leaves and back into the atmosphere. All forests, all trees, all vegetation—great movers of water—are constantly returning to the atmosphere water that had fallen as rain. It rises again and again within the thin fabric of the biospheric envelope and condenses into those white clouds you see above to fall down again to water the earth.

Living and working mindfully and carefully within the biosphere, we



come to understand that we must not break that cycle of water; we must work to restore the places where it has been broken. We do this because it is God's gift to sustain all the earth's creatures over which we have the mandate of stewardship, our *oikumenical* work. When we receive it gratefully and properly, this is a gift that keeps on giving.

Previous generations did not have our knowledge and understanding of how delicate our biospheric home really is. But we have no excuse. We know, and we know more each passing day, what we are doing to the magnificent membrane of life on God's earth. And, coming into our own as the children of God, we can respond to the groaning of an abused creation by nurturing it carefully. Creation, we know, will welcome its reclamation by the meek of the earth. It will welcome the coming of the children of God (Romans 8:18-25). ■

From Song of a Scientist: The Harmony of a God-Soaked Creation, by Calvin B. DeWitt, copyright 2012. Used with permission of Square Inch (SquareInchBooks.org).

give advice professionally—are capable of doing the opposite.

Your new memoir, *Wild*, can be uncomfortable to read: You were angry at God, deeply grieving your mother's death, and at times quite self-destructive. But it's also a beautifully honest tale because of how you go back and mine those painful experiences. What was it like emotionally to revisit and reconstruct that time in your life?

Thanks for your kind words. Writing *Wild* was both healing and informative. I learned a lot about my life and human nature by having to so deeply reflect upon my younger years,

“All sorts of people are capable of giving excellent advice, just as all sorts of people are capable of doing the opposite.”

which were full of grief and tumult. From this distance, I could see myself more clearly and that allowed me insight not only into the girl I used to be, but also the woman I am now. I cried a lot while writing *Wild*, but I laughed a lot, too.

How did nature help you heal?

The same way it still does: by being so tremendously simple and complex at once. By its power and its silence. Like many people, I feel gathered when I'm among trees and grasses and wild things. I feel like I can breathe.

How does sharing personal advice compare with completing your memoir, both extremely personal forms of writing?

They feel similar to me in a lot of ways. Of course, in the “Dear Sugar” columns I'm answering a letter from someone seeking my advice, so I'm mindful that my writing has a mission—to offer help and guidance to another person. But ultimately I draw from the same well in all of my writing. ■

Brittany Shoot is a Sojourners contributing writer.

Reviewed by Joshua Witchger

AN INDIE CALL TO WORSHIP

Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, by The Welcome Wagon. Asthmatic Kitty Records.

IN THE 17TH century, Thomas Brooks published the devotional *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, which he hoped would serve as a "salve for sores" and a "remedy against malady," to provide those who face hardship with nourishment, support, and cheer to continue God's work in themselves and the world.

It's no coincidence that The Welcome Wagon borrows Brooks' title for its second LP. In unsettling economic and political climates, the married gospel-folk duo of Vito and Monique Aiuto write songs that offer a balm of spiritual medicine to heal their congregation and wider audience.

Before the Aiutos gained a musical presence, Vito worked at a Presbyterian church in Manhattan and was a minister to students at New York University. Six years ago he helped found Resurrection Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Brooklyn, where he and Monique continue to serve a young, diverse congregation.

In their ministry at Resurrection, they released their first album in 2008 (*Welcome to The Welcome Wagon*); close friend and indie music icon Sufjan Stevens helped record and produce it. The album was met with high acclaim and sounded like a natural extension of Stevens' own catalogue. With a popular musical ally and an overtly spiritual foundation, The Welcome Wagon yielded an unlikely coupling: the hip and the religious.

In a *New York Times* article titled "A Congregation in Skinny Jeans," Vito confronts this, saying that while he may fit the "cool" bill, it's an unhelpful way to describe a church community. Despite his tweed jacket and gentleman's cap, he'd prefer to be known for his personhood and for speaking honestly.

This is where *Precious Remedies* steps in. Far from a show of hip pretension, the Aiutos write music hoping to spur a connection between people and God. The album



Vito and Monique Aiuto

resembles a worship service, revolving around a liturgical structure to provide spiritual wholeness.

As such, *Precious Remedies* begins with the confession, "I'm not fine / you're not fine / we're not fine." As the anthem repeats, it slowly moves into a somber setting for the absolution, "Lamb of God, you take away the sin."

Throughout the 13 songs, the liturgy frames the story while the assurance of God's provision drives the plot. Movements flow from love of the divine to the love of human relations, from atonement with God to fellowship with one another.

After a reworking of popular Christian musician David Crowder's "Remedy," where the theological tension of already/not emerges, the duo takes the gift of Christ's presence to make amends in the present in the lushly beautiful "Would You Come and See Me in New York?" Here is yearning to rekindle a parental relationship that has grown distant. In raw honesty Vito sings, "I'm not mad, the past is through / I don't need answers, I just need you."

While *Precious Remedies* showcases a variety of styles and instruments (folk instruments, horns, a choir, and lyrics from Charles Wesley to The Cure), its re-creation of a weekly routine allows it to feel both familiar and fresh.

As the album comes to a close, a lively benediction concludes the journey in peaceful expectation. "God be with you till we meet again," they sing, as organ accentuates the catchy melody. As the postlude track "Nature's Goodnight" swells, church has ended.

And as good worship services will, the listener is left feeling that the gospel call to "go into all the world" seems both possible and exciting. ■

Joshua Witchger is online editorial assistant at Sojourners.

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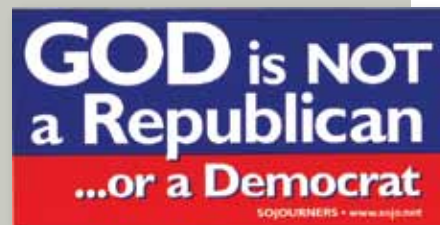
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Dynamics of Ordinary Time

LISTENING TO THE scriptures requires a gentle determination to remove the filters that tend, in our religious culture, to allow in only what serves individual solace or personal edification. The scriptures probe the realities of power, how it is cornered, monopolized, deployed, lost, and regained at every level—in societies, in institutions, in families—as well as in the dynamics of our own lives. Even the best Bible study groups and sermons often surrender to the bias exerted unconsciously by our own individual neediness. Perhaps a conscious policy is needed to heed the word of God as it dissects the social body, lays bare its anatomy, and reveals its diseases. This approach may have a greater impact on our personal lives than conventional piety.

Far from reducing the spirituality of our engagement with scripture, learning its hermeneutic of power is likely to intensify our appreciation of its relevance to our own immediate issues and needs. As persons, we internalize and encapsulate the forces at work on a larger scale in a struggling world. God is wholly present as redemptive, suffering, hope-engendering love at every level of existence—from the inner dynamics of the soul to couples, families, neighborhoods, nations, the planet, and the entire universe. One of the most ancient religious instincts of humanity gave rise to the concept of the human person as a microcosm, a world in miniature. Scripture's word is addressed to us in our unique personhood, and to the churches, communities, and nations in which we are embedded.



Martin Smith is an Episcopal priest serving at St. Columba's Church in Washington, D.C.

[JULY 1]

'Thou Shalt Share'

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

IN THIS ELECTION year, certain passages of scripture become touchstones for testing political claims. Imagine how this maxim, quoted by Paul in this passage from 2 Corinthians, would draw fire in current debates—"The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little!" (verse 15). We can hear the cry go up: Socialism!

In our system, those who have amassed vast wealth, and the political power it can buy, make sure they invest a lot of it in propaganda insisting that there is no such thing as having too much, that the best thing for the body politic is to ensure that they get even more. In contrast, scripture underscores our God-mandated mutual responsibility for making certain that everyone gets their basic human needs met, and sharing as the very basis of society.

To those with ears attuned to the evangelist's use of symbolism, the fact that Jairus' daughter was 12 years old, and that the

woman cured of a hemorrhage has suffered for 12 years, is no mere coincidence. With these subtle hints Mark reminds us that Jesus has come not to revive and heal individuals alone. He has come for all 12 tribes, the whole people, and for us today, our whole society, which is hemorrhaging and sick in so many ways.

[JULY 8]

Playing the Fool?

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalm 123;
2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

PAUL MUST HAVE been a frequent theatergoer. His sardonic asides about speaking like "a fool" in his letters to the Corinthians refer to the performances of clowns who appeared on stage in the intermissions, spouting ludicrous speeches that parodied the smug attitudes of the local grandees in the expensive seats. Paul pokes fun at the

"superapostles" (verse 11) who congratulated themselves on spiritual gifts and talents, which they were sure entitled them to leadership roles in the church.

What has Paul to boast of? A vision—but he can't describe it! Mighty prayer to be healed of a chronic ailment—but he hasn't been cured! So what is the real qualification for apostleship? Vulnerability. And the willingness to accept the reality that all is grace: "whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (verse 10). Mark's gospel passage, with instructions for the 12, is equally clear: Those who bear the good news must embrace their vulnerability to being rejected by those who won't hear of the kingdom. They must let these setbacks go, shake off the dust, and simply move on, without wasting their energies in futile self-doubt.

[JULY 15]

Birthday Bloodbaths

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19; Psalm 85:8-13;
Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29

THERE ARE ONLY two birthday celebrations mentioned in canonical scripture, both of them thrown by paranoid rulers with blood on their hands. Pharaoh marks his birthday by hanging his chief baker (Genesis 40:20-22). In Mark's gospel story of a royal birthday bash, Herod's hideous blend of religiosity, grandiosity, and savagery led to the beheading of John the Baptist. Birthdays are no better in the Apocrypha! The tyrant Antiochus insists on a public birthday celebration every month, and makes them occasions for forcing Jews to take part in the cult of Dionysus and torturing some to death (2 Maccabees 6:1-11). Paranoia, narcissism, sadism ... scripture won't let us turn away our faces from the morbid pathology that has always fueled dictatorship, as it does in today's world.

The majestic poetry that opens the letter to the Ephesians provides a total contrast. Here we are invited to celebrate our own lives—but not as individuals turned in on ourselves.

We glory in our adoption as children in God's great and universal family, with our lives originating not in the accidents of

mere human parentage, but in God's original "plan for the fullness of time" (verse 10). God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (verse 4), and our destiny is to be caught up in the current of irresistible love that will never rest until everything is drawn into the divine embrace. God intends to "gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (verse 10).

[JULY 22]

Power in the Provisional

2 Samuel 7:1-14; Psalm 23;
Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

IF SCRIPTURE DEPLOYS such dangerously anthropomorphic metaphors as the "wrath of God," perhaps we should dare to coin new ones that are equally risky: How about the "ambivalence of God"? Scripture depicts a God struggling with the dilemma of working with a people who, sooner or later, are going to demand a temple. Humanity can't seem to do without shrines. These passages from 2 Samuel illustrate the ambivalence of God,

We can hear the cry go up: Socialism!

as God shares with Nathan nostalgia for the old days of a mobile sanctuary—the tabernacle—a way for God to travel light with a pilgrim people. The temple will inevitably come, with the transition to Solomon in all his glory. But God prefers the "power inherent in the provisional," or as Taizé founder Brother Roger called it, *le dynamique du provisoire*.

Mixed, unstable metaphors in the Ephesians passage (for instance, the collapsing "dividing wall" in verse 14) aptly express God's ambivalence about sacred structures. The writer daren't use the metaphor of the church as God's temple without blending in organic movement and growth and the metaphor of the living Body of Christ. The temple whose doom Jesus predicted was supposed to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7), but it had become a shrine for nationalism, expressing in its very structure

the exclusion of the Gentiles. Jesus' cross destroyed that barrier. Now we must find ways of expressing God-willed oneness in our institutions today—and stay tuned to God's ambivalence about our structures, reckoning with their potential for being both sacramental and detrimental.

[JULY 29]

A Fourth Temptation of Christ?

2 Samuel 11:1-15; Psalm 145:10-18;
Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

"THEY WERE ABOUT to come and take him by force to make him king" (John 6:15). John's comment throws a flood of light on the feeding of the 5,000. The gospels of Mark and Luke suggest that they were all men, and had been marshaled in formations of 50 and 100. Jewish agitation peaked every Passover, and if Roman legionaries had spied on the gathering, they would have recognized instantly that this was another attempt to rally a Jewish resistance force. Jesus is being tested in the wilderness again. Will he yield to the power struggle where violence triggers counterviolence? The miracle *within* the wonder of the mysterious meal is that Jesus is able to defuse this crisis. He won't swerve from the way of nonviolence, however much it seems to the majority to be futile, unpatriotic, and cowardly.

The Ephesians passage, one of scripture's profoundest prayers, takes us straight to the mystical core of the gospel. We pray to intensify our awareness of Christ dwelling in our hearts, to deepen the roots that are being thrust down into the boundless love of God, and to stretch our capacities for passion and empathy in every dimension of experience. Thomas Merton interprets it beautifully. "In prayer we discover what we already have through the indwelling Spirit of God and our incorporation through baptism into Christ. You start where you are and deepen what you already have ... All we need is to experience what we already possess." ■

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Born to Pedal...

THE FIRST BUG was a surprise, glancing off my front teeth to lodge in the nosepiece of my fashionable clip-on sunglasses. Note to self: When biking to work, keep your mouth closed. So the second bug was totally my fault, but I defy you to bike three whole miles without exuberantly singing songs from Broadway musicals. ("Oklahoma" is particularly susceptible to bug ingestion.)

Fortunately, the second insect was quite palatable: chewy, of course, but with an aftertaste of fresh clover

it informed me that my license has been suspended for 180 days. But I can explain:

You know how it is when you're northbound on I-95, a highway of mind-numbing flatness, like Kansas, but with more Starbucks. And you know how it is when you're driving your hybrid electric car and feeling your oats—or, for younger people not familiar with that expression, feeling your Red Bull—and you want to see how fast you can go while STILL getting 58 miles per gallon.

And you know how it is when you get pulled over by a sheriff's deputy from Unnamed

Rural County, Virginia, and you decelerate safely onto the shoulder and reach into the glove compartment for your registration, taking care not to look like you're hurriedly assembling a shoulder-fired missile launcher.

And you know how it is when the police officer gets out of his car, walks up, and his young, round face fills your window, prompting you to wonder if you should helpfully point out the spot he'd missed during that morning's shave. (But sometimes, at life's critical moments, it's best to count to 10 before being helpful.)

Well, apparently this young man can't keep a secret and notified D.C.'s Department of Motor Vehicles (LUCIFER), and its computer immediately assigned 12 points to my driving record, meaning that this otherwise blameless and innocent

citizen must now use the same number of carbon credits that Jesus did during his ministry, but with a better bicycle.

Of course, Jesus didn't arrive at his destinations with helmet hair, which would have muted the enthusiasm of the crowds. ("Dude, what's with his hair?" "Shut up, he's talking. And I heard he brought food.") But after biking to work, much of my day is spent with hair that flairs up around the edges, making me look like one of those African Cape buffaloes, or a young Mary Tyler Moore.

On the plus side of biking, I do get to wear super-hip reflective ankle ties, which make my pant legs balloon up attractively, and an orange safety vest that just *drips* cool.

SO WHILE ONCE I was an assertive driver, commanding the road with speed and skill, now I'm a two-wheeler and a militant advocate for biking rights. I proudly claim the curb side of the road, and respond adamantly to vehicular intrusions. "You honking at ME?!" I shout back, resisting the temptation to question the driver's maternal lineage, adding, "What part of 'bike lane' don't you understand?!"

I also walk a lot, as Jesus did, communing with the common folk that make this nation so great, when they're not shoving each other out of the way to get into a subway car. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Like Jesus, I'm saving a lot of money on gas.

and just a hint of oak, suggesting it might go well with a nice pinot noir or, on a particularly hot day, a carafe of iced sangria. (Note: When June bugs are out in force, replace wine with a mint-flavored mouthwash. And flossing is a necessity.)

I BIKE TO work these days because the District of Columbia has strongly suggested I do so, in lieu of spending a year in jail and up to \$5,000 in fines. Frankly, I could use the time incarcerated to catch up on my reading, but it seems to me that in imposing a fine they're just trying to punish me. (Although there's a chance that was their point.)

This was communicated to me in a letter from the D.C. Department of Motor Vehicles (SATAN). Using the terse and unforgiving language of a junior high school principal,

Bring Justice to Our Backyard

No one wants their child to play in this backyard, yet there are 19,152 families in Central Appalachia, including thousands of children, who live in homes without complete plumbing. These families have to resort to improvised methods to remove raw sewage from their homes at the cost of a polluted backyard and local water supplies.

Do your part to improve the lives of children in Central Appalachia by visiting www.fahe.org/donate today!



fahe
Strength in Numbers

UMCOR'S

US DISASTER RESPONSE

When disaster strikes, it is local churches that provide the first response to their communities. This basic understanding—that disaster response is local—forms the foundation for the United Methodist Committee on Relief's (UMCOR) US disaster training and response. First and foremost, UMCOR is a resource for the local response.



When responding to a disaster in the United States, UMCOR provides the following four things:

- **Training**— UMCOR trains teams of volunteers.
- **Financial Assistance**—If the bishop of the affected conference contacts UMCOR, an emergency grant may be sent.
- **Expertise**— UMCOR's disaster-response experience and knowledge are made available to those in need.
- **Networking**— Getting connected with NGOs, volunteers, experts, local government, and other organizations can help communities recover from disaster.

US Disaster Response, UMCOR Advance #901670

www.umcor.org



PHOTO: MIKE DUBOSE